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142 hospitalised, 20 new diarrhoea cases in Indore

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Markets decline amid US tariff hike threat

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# SC denies bail to Umar, Imam in Delhi riots; Relief for five

## Says 5 yrs in jail is not a 'trump card' for bail, cites proof; Duo can apply for bail after a year

**NEW DELHI, 5 JAN**

The Supreme Court on Monday denied bail to activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, accused in the 2020 Delhi riots conspiracy case, while granting bail to five others, citing a "hierarchy of participation" that placed Khalid and Imam on a "different footing."

Reasonable grounds exist for believing that the allegations against Khalid and Imam are prima facie true, the court said.

The two have been in jail for the past five years without a trial under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), which makes securing bail exceptionally difficult.

A bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and NV Anjaria observed that Khalid and Imam were involved in the "planning, mobilisation and strategic direction" of the riots. The five granted bail were Gulfisha Fatima, Meeran Haider, Shifa Ur Rehman, Mohammad Saleem Khan, and Shadab Ahmad. Khalid and Imam may file fresh bail applications after protected witnesses are examined or after one year.

The February 2020 riots in northeast Delhi, triggered during protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), left 53 dead. Khalid was arrested in September 2020 for allegedly delivering provocative speeches.

> **Good good, aa jana. Ab yahi zindagi hai (This is my life now)**
>
> —Umar Khalid to his partner Banojyotsna Lahiri on her visiting him in jail

Khalid completed his PhD at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in 2019, while Imam was a doctoral scholar there at the time of his arrest. Both are 37.

The Supreme Court said that prolonged pre-trial custody does not automatically entitle an accused to bail, particularly under the UAPA. According to the apex court, delay in trial does not operate as a "trump card" which automatically displaces statutory safeguards.

"Right to liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution requires the State to justify prolonged pre-trial custody," the bench said.

The top court said that while bail in UAPA cases is not given as a matter of routine, the law does not mandate denial of bail as default. It also does not exclude the court's jurisdiction to allow bail. The bench noted that although their incarceration has been long and continuous, it does not violate constitutional guarantees nor override the statutory bar on bail under the applicable law.

Khalid faces multiple UAPA charges relating to terrorism and conspiracy, alongside Indian Penal Code offences including murder, rioting, sedition, promoting enmity, and criminal conspiracy, as well as illegal arms possession under the Arms Act.

Meanwhile, The JNU Teachers' Association recalled the "barbarous assault" on students and faculty six years ago on the varsity campus, noting that the identities of those who carried out the attack remain "masked" even today. —*PTI*

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## RAPIST OUT ON 15TH PAROLE

Supporters of Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh put up posters welcoming him as he walked out of jail on his 15th parole on Monday. Serving a 20-year sentence for raping two disciples, Ram Rahim has spent over 446 days on parole since 2017 ***PHOTO: SCREEGRAB***

# B'desh bans IPL broadcast after KKR drops Mustafizur

**DHAKA, 5 JAN**

Bangladesh on Monday banned the broadcast of IPL's upcoming season to protest pacer Mustafizur Rahman's ouster from the world's biggest T20 league amid a steady deterioration of the country's diplomatic ties with India.

A statement from the information and broadcast ministry of Muhammad Yunus' interim government here stated that no "logical reason" was given by the BCCI while instructing IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders to release Rahman from its 2026 roster.

The IPL is due to start on 26 March.

The move to ban IPL broadcast came a day after

Bangladesh refused to travel to India for next month's T20 World Cup and requested the International Cricket Council to shift all its league games to Sri Lanka, the co-host of the tournament.

"No logical reason for such a decision (Rahman's release) by the BCCI is known, and such a decision has saddened, hurt, and aggrieved the people of Bangladesh," read the government notification.

"In this situation, until further notice, it is requested by order to stop the broadcasting/telecasting of all matches and programs of the Indian Premier League (IPL). "This order is issued with the approval of the proper authority and in the public interest," said the signed by assistant secretary Feroz Khan.

BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia, while announcing the diktat to release Rahman, had merely stated that it was being done because of "developments all around", without explaining the specifics.

Bangladesh was scheduled to play three T20 World Cup matches in Kolkata and one in Mumbai. —*PTI*

## CM set to break Devaraj Urs' record as longest CM

**MYSURU, 5 JAN**

Set to surpass D Devaraj Urs as the longest serving Chief Minister of Karnataka on January 7, Siddaramaiah on Monday credited the historic milestone to the blessings of people. Urs had served as Chief Minister of the state for 7 years and 239 days. Siddaramaiah would complete seven years and 240 days on Wednesday, surpassing Urs. Highlighting a key difference between himself and Urs, he said while Urs belonged to the ruling class, he hailed from the socially backward community (Kuruba or shepherd). —*PTI*

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## Gas leak at ONGC well in Andhra causes inferno

**MORI, 5 JAN**

A gas pipeline leak at a well in Dr BR Ambedkar Konaseema district in Andhra Pradesh operated by ONGC's production contractor Deep Industries Ltd, triggered a fire on Monday. However, there were no casualties reported, according to preliminary information shared by an official of the Maharatna public sector company. Following the gas leak and the subsequent fire, senior officials of the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) from Rajahmundry rushed to Mori village, where the blaze broke out at Well Mori-5, official said. —*PTI*

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## Mamata to move court against SIR

**GANGASAGAR, 5 JAN**

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday said she would move court against the EC's SIR of electoral rolls in West Bengal, alleging fear, harassment and administrative arbitrariness that she claimed had led to deaths and hospitalisations, as she sharpened her confrontation with the poll body ahead of the assembly polls. Addressing a government programme at Sagar Island in South 24 Parganas, Banerjee escalated her attack on the EC, alleging that opaque digital processes, including artificial intelligence and informal platforms, were being used to arbitrarily delete names from electoral rolls. —*PTI*

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## India launches e-Business visa for China

**BEIJING, 5 JAN**

India has introduced an e-Production Investment Business Visa called e-B-4 Visa that Chinese businessmen can apply for to travel to India for specific business activities. A latest advisory on the Indian Embassy website here said the e-B-4 Visa, which was introduced on 1 January, can be applied for online without visiting the embassy or agents. The new visa is introduced in view of the growing demand for business visas to travel to India. It will be issued in about 45 to 50 days, with permission to stay in India for up to six months. The visa can be applied for installation and commissioning, quality check and essential maintenance, production, IT and ERP ramp-up, training, supply chain development for empanelling vendors, plant design and bring-up, senior management and executives, according to the advisory. —*PTI*

# Trump threatens India with tariffs again

**NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 5 JAN**

US President Donald Trump has said Prime Minister Narendra Modi knew he was not happy with India's purchases of Russian oil and that Washington can raise tariffs on New Delhi "very quickly".

These remarks were made by President Trump while talking to reporters on Sunday aboard Air Force One en route to Washington DC from Florida.

"They (India) wanted to make me happy, basically. Modi is a very good man; he is a good guy. He knew I was not happy, and it was important to make me happy. They do trade and we can raise tariffs on them very quickly. It would be very bad for them," Trump said.

Trump's remarks came after US Senator Lindsey Graham, accompanying him on Air Force One, said that the tariffs imposed on India by Trump are the "chief reason" New Delhi is now buying substantially less Russian oil. Graham claimed that Indian Ambassador to the US Vinay Kwatra informed him that New Delhi was reducing its purchases of Russian oil and asked him to convey to Trump to "relieve the tariff" imposed on India. He said that to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict, pressure must be put on Russian President Vladimir Putin's customers. Trump said that the sanctions are hurting Russia very badly, and then mentioned India. —*PTI*

# Water supply stopped after fears of contamination in B'luru

**BENGALURU, 5 JAN**

The Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) stopped water supply to parts of the city's Lingarajapuram locality after reports of sewage contamination in drinking water, triggering health concerns among residents.

It has been reported that Several residents had been falling ill frequently over the past few months, with some requiring hospitalisation for suspected water-borne infections, leading to speculations about water contamination.

The contamination has affected around 30–40 households in KSFC Layout under the North City Corporation limits, forcing families to depend on private water sources for over a week. To combat this shortage of water, BWSSB has SB deployed 'Sanchari Kaveri' mobile tankers to supply free potable water to affected households.

The BWSSB is also said to have launched an intensive investigation using advanced robotic technology along with ground staff to accurately detect the source of contamination. "We are using every technological resource available to trace the fault line without digging up the entire area blindly," BWSSB Chairman Ram Prasath Manohar said, adding that a strict deadline has been set to identify and correct the problem. —*Salar News*

Around 30–40 houses in KSFC Layout received black water from their taps, as seen in the picture

## 3 boys held for pelting stones on procession in B'luru

**BENGALURU, 5 JAN**

Three minor boys have been detained in connection with a stone pelting incident targeting Om Shakti devotees at Jagjeevan Ram Nagar (JJ Nagar) on Sunday night, police said.

Two women were injured in the attack during a procession between 8.15 pm and 9 pm. One female devotee sustained a serious head injury with bleeding wounds and was admitted to a local hospital for treatment.

The incident prompted residents to stage a demonstration at JJ Nagar police station, demanding swift action against the culprits. According to police sources, the three boys, aged around 15, were responsible for throwing stones at the procession.

An FIR was registered late on Sunday night based on a complaint by Shashikumar N, a resident of VS Garden. The complainant alleged that three to four youths carried out the attack and claimed that similar incidents, including arson, had occurred during religious observances in the past.

It was also alleged that the locality has a significant Dalit population and has witnessed instances of atrocities against Dalits. —*PTI*

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## India urges citizens to avoid non-essential travel to Iran

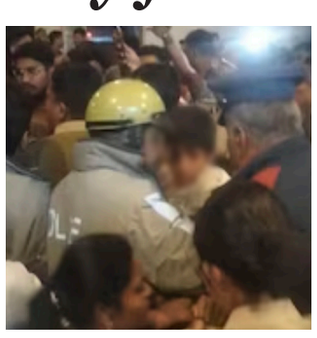
**NEW DELHI, 5 JAN**

India on Monday urged its nationals to avoid non-essential travel to Iran as the country has been rocked by a wave of protests over inflation and currency devaluation.

New Delhi also advised Indian citizens in Iran to exercise due caution and avoid travelling to areas witnessing protests or demonstrations. The MEA also advised Indian nationals living in Iran on resident-visas to register with the embassy, if not already done so.This was after US President Donald Trump warned Iran against a crackdown on protesters. The protests against worsening economic conditions began in Tehran around nine days back. Now, around 25 provinces out of 31 have witnessed the protests in which over 10 people have been killed. The protests were triggered by a sharp fall in the value of the Iranian currency, rial, against the US dollar. —*PTI*

**COPS SAVE HIM FROM MOB**

# *Boy films women in B'luru theatre washroom*



**BENGALURU, 5 JAN**

- The camera was discovered by moviegoers using the theatre washroom, leading to an altercation.

Chaos ensued in Bengaluru's Sandhya Cinema Theatre , after a teenage boy was caught filming videos inside the ladies' washroom. According to reports, a hidden camera was found inside the ladies' washroom during a screening of the re-released Telugu film 'Nuvvu Naaku Nachav'.

The camera was discovered by moviegoers using the washroom, leading to an altercation.

The boy was thrashed by the crowd before police have took him into custody and are investigating into the matter.

The video of the altercation went viral, drawing reaction from Netizens who demanded strong action against the boy.

Police said that another suspect had been taken into inquiry. The management of the theatre is also being questioned. Efforts are underway to trace others accused, and further investigation is in progress. —*Agencies.*

# Vance's Ohio house attacked, windows smashed

**CINCINNATI, 5 JAN**

A man who smashed windows and caused property damage at US Vice President JD Vance's Ohio home was detained early Monday, the US Secret Service said.

The suspect was apprehended shortly after midnight by agents stationed at the residence in Walnut Hills, east of downtown Cincinnati. According to officials, the man broke a window with a hammer and attempted to enter the house, after first vandalising a Secret Service vehicle in the driveway.

The home was unoccupied at the time, and Vance and his family were not in Ohio. The suspect has not been named. The Secret Service is coordinating with Cincinnati police and the US attorney's office as charges are reviewed.. —*PTI*

## Siddaramaiah will complete his full term: Satish

**MYSURU, 5 JANUARY**

Public Works Minister Satish Jarkiholi on Monday sought to put to rest the discussion over a change in leadership in the state, saying Chief Minister Siddaramaiah was elected for five years, and would complete his full term. Speaking to reporters in Mysuru, Jarkiholi said, "There is a need to stop the discussion on change in leadership. I have reiterated on various occasions that the CM post is not vacant now. CM Siddaramaiah will complete his full five-year term." The minister said he had never issued any statements on the subject of change in leadership, even as he said that the issue was likely to come to the fore once again after the budget presentation by CM Siddaramaiah. Satish Jharkhiholi also made it clear that he was not in the race for the post of chief minister. He said he was neither an aspirant for the post of KPCC president as the post is not vacant now. *—Salar News*

## PU college lecturer arrested in rape case

**KALABURAGI, 5 DEC**

Afzalpur police arrested Rajkumar Kumbhar, an economics lecturer at a local PU college, on charges of raping a student. An FIR was registered at the Afzalpur police station. Parents and members of the public staged a protest in front of the college on Saturday, demanding the lecturer's arrest. Police said Kumbhar had gone absconding even before protests began, but was arrested within hours of the FIR being registered and produced before a court. Subsequently, he was remanded to judicial custody and sent to the central prison, as per court orders. The complainant student has also alleged that the lecturer had sexually harassed other female students as well. *—Salar News*

## CM vows fast-track trial in honour killing of woman

**BENGALURU, 5 JAN**

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday said ensuring a swift investigation and justice was the state government's top priority in the alleged honour killing of Manya, a pregnant Lingayat woman reportedly killed by her family at Inam Veerapur village in Hubballi taluk on 21 December for marrying a Dalit man, Vivekananda Doddamani. Siddaramaiah announced plants to fast-track the court case, on X. The minister noted that as the case falls under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, the charge sheet must be filed within 60 days, and added that steps were being taken to appoint special public prosecutors to ensure timely and effective prosecution. *—PTI*

# City's JJR Nagar tense after stone pelting at procession

### Security tightened with senior cops camping in the locality

**BENGALURU, 5 JAN**

The situation in Jagjeevan Ram Nagar was tense but under control following an incident of stone pelting on devotees during a procession from the local Om Shakti temple on Sunday night, police said.

Two women and a child were injured in the attack, with sources confirming head injuries to both the child and a young girl. Following the incident, devotees staged a protest outside the Jagjeevan Ram Nagar police station, demanding swift action and registration of a First Information Report (FIR). The police have registered an FIR and launched an investigation.

Security has been tightened in the area, and West Division Deputy Commissioner of Police Yatish NB visited the station to review the situation. Additional police personnel have been deployed to prevent any retaliatory action by the aggrieved community. Senior officers have camped in the locality to trace and apprehend the culprits.

The incident has sparked a political outcry. In a post on X, BJP Karnataka president BY Vijayendra criticised the Congress government, alleging a "complete collapse of law and order" and warning that selective enforcement of the law is fuelling communal tension. He called for the immediate identification and prosecution of all miscreants "without fear or favour".

Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly R Ashoka emphasised the need for serious police action to prevent recurrence. "The devotees were attacked while returning quietly after visiting the temple. The girl who was injured has suffered mental trauma. We have assured her of all treatment and cooperation," he told reporters.

Police have stated that "necessary action will be taken once the identities of the perpetrators are established," and assured that the situation remains under control. *—PTI*

Following the incident, devotees protested outside the Jagjeevan Ram Nagar police station, demanding swift action and registration of FIR *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

- Police have stated that "necessary action will be taken once the identities of the perpetrators are established," and assured that the situation remains under control.

Siddaramaiah met with AICC General Secretary KC Venugopal during a brief stopover at Mysuru airport *PHOTO: SALAR*

## CM hints at CID probe in Ballari case

**MYSURU, 5 JAN**

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday indicated that the state government might hand over the Ballari firing case to the state Criminal Investigation Department (CID) even as Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy demanded a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe into the incident.

Speaking to reporters, he stated that the Ballari district police are probing the incident. "Our Police are efficient. After we get a report from them, to state home minister G Paramehwara, we will decide if the case should be handed over to CID."

When asked about the demand for a judicial probe by a sitting HC judge, the CM said he will discuss the matter with the home minister.

The CM further said that he would discuss the issue of cabinet reshuffle with Congress president Rahul Gandhi after meeting him by the end of this month.

On completion of 1000 days in office, the Chief Minister said, "Forget about becoming the CM twice, I had not dreamt of becoming a minister. He added that it was people's love that has seen him emerge as a leader."

Siddaramaiah also met with AICC general secretary KC Venugopal during a brief stopover at Mysuru airport.

"CBI must do the enquiry into the incident of Ballari... The reason for the incident is the Maharshi Valmiki statue installation program. Today I saw in the newspapers that the government had not permitted the installation of any statue," Kumaraswamy pointed out. *—Salar News*

# BJP protests against relief for Kogilu evictees

**BENGALURU, 5 JAN**

The BJP on Monday staged a protest sit in here against the government's move to provide houses to those who lost their dwellings during the recent eviction of encroachments in Kogilu.

The protest, held near the Country Club on Bagalur Main Road under the slogan 'Save Kogilu, Remove Illegal Immigrants', was led by BJP state president B Y Vijayendra, Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly R Ashoka, Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council Chalavadi Narayanaswamy, and other BJP MLAs and MLCs.

Addressing reporters, senior BJP leader Ashoka said the agitation was aimed at protecting Karnataka's land, which he said belongs to the people of the state and should be distributed only to them.

He alleged that police stopped BJP workers nearly three kilometres away from the protest site, calling the move unfair.

Ashoka said the issue had been politicised and linked it to developments in Kerala politics.

Criticising the Congress leadership, including Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, he alleged that the government was using Karnataka's land for political gain.

"Karnataka has limited land resources, and the land belongs to the people of the state, not to any individual leader," he said, adding that if Congress leaders wanted to support the move, they should offer their own land.

BJP state president Vijayendra questioned the government's decision to provide housing to those whose homes were demolished after initially deciding to remove illegal structures.

He alleged that the decision amounted to a reversal under political pressure. *—PTI*

The protest, held near the Country Club on Bagalur Main Road under the slogan 'Save Kogilu, Remove Illegal Immigrants', was led by BJP State President BY Vijayendra and LoP R Ashoka *PHOTO: SALAR*

**2 FIGHTS IN A DAY**

# BJP, Cong leader come to blows in Bidar

**BIDAR, 5 JAN**

BJP MLA from Humnabad Assembly seat Dr Siddalingappa Patil and Congress MLC Bhimrao Patil came to blows (in pic) and hurled abuses at each other during a discussion on land encroachment in the district-level quarterly progress review (KDP) meeting at the Zilla Panchayat auditorium here on Monday.

The ruckus broke out during the review meeting, being chaired by District In-charge Minister Eshwar Khandre with Minister Rahim Khan in attendance.

As the discussion on forest land in Humnabad began, Dr Siddalingappa and Bhimrao began to speak on the subject. But the debate soon escalated into a heated exchange between the two leaders.

As Siddalingappa was speaking, Bhimrao Patil strongly objected and walked towards him. The two confronted each other, clashed physically and shouted abuses at the top of their voices. Bhimrao Patil's brother, MLC Chandrashekhar, followed him and stood up in support.

As the situation began to spiral out of control, ASP Chandrakant Poojari had to intervene to restore order. Minister Eshwar B Khandre, Deputy Commissioner Shilpa Sharma and SP Pradeep Gunti also stepped in to bring the situation under control. The meeting was later adjourned indefinitely without any discussion.

Speaking to Salar News, Siddalingappa Patil alleged, "Congress MLCs Bhimrao and Chandrashekhar attacked me for raising questions about an illegal layout on 48 acres of land, worth Rs 500 crore, given to the Sikh Community, saying, 'I'll deal with you, come outside'."

Janata Dal (Secular), district president Ramesh Solpur Patil, later told Salar News, "Elected representatives should set an example, not indulge in abusive language and brawls." —Salar News

## Cong-BJP workers clash in front of Union Minister

**KOPPAL, 5 JAN**

Drama unfolded at a ceremony organised to lay the foundation stone for a railway overbridge, as BJP and Congress workers clashed in the presence of Union Minister V Somanna over the alleged omission of the names of a state minister. The situation quickly escalated, with chairs reportedly hurled near the stage. Police personnel were seen struggling to contain the agitated party workers as tempers ran high at the event site. According to sources, Congress workers protested the absence of District-in-Charge Minister Shivraj Tangadagi and Koppal MP Rajashekhar Hitnal's names on venue banners. Tensions escalated further after Somanna allegedly referred to Congress supporters as "patalam," a term implying a mob or gang of henchmen. *—PTI*

# FIR filed against Athani MLA Savadi & his son

**BELAGAVI, 5 JAN**

FIR has been registered against Athani Congress MLA Laxman Savadi and his son **Chidanand Savadi** (pic) for allegedly assaulting president of the Belagavi District Central Cooperative Bank (DCC Bank) Employees' Association Ningraj Karennavar.

Karennavar, who sustained injuries in the incident, is undergoing treatment at a hospital in Belagavi. He lodged a complaint with the Athani police from the hospital, following which a case was registered against eight persons, including the MLA and his son.

Belagavi Superintendent of Police Ramrajan said that based on Karennavar's complaint, the Athani police registered an FIR under Sections 189(2), 191(2), 115(2), 351(2), 352(2) and 190, of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) relating to unlawful assembly, assault, criminal intimidation and use of abusive language. In his complaint, Karennavar alleged that he was summoned to Savadi's residence in Athani last week under the pretext of resolving differences related to a union matter. However, he claimed he was slapped and kicked, following which seven to eight others assaulted him after he fell to the ground, causing head injuries.

Savadi dismissed the allegations as false and claimed Karennavar abused the party worker using obscene and caste-based language. He also suspected political conspiracy by rivals. Sources close to Savadi alleged that Karennavar acted at the behest of Gokak BJP MLA Ramesh Jarkiholi amid rivalry over control of the DCC Bank. *—Salar News*

## 30,000 STUDENTS GRADUATE FROM UNIVERSITY OF MYSORE

**MYSURU, 5 JAN**

At least 30,966 students were awarded degrees at the 106th Annual Convocation of the University of Mysore on Monday, with Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot conferring degrees, including 449 PhDs, and honouring 213 rank holders.

N Adithi, MSc Chemistry, stood out by receiving 24 gold medals and eight cash prizes, followed by MA Mansoor Ahammed (Languages) with six gold medals and two cash prizes. Chandrashekhara, son of a daily wage couple from Koppal (MA Kannada), won 13 gold medals and four cash prizes. Harmain T, daughter of a KSRTC conductor and a teacher couple, secured six gold medals in BSc, while visually impaired Nisarga Gowda (MA Kannada) received one gold medal. Addressing the convocation, Governor Gehlot emphasised the need for an education system that blends modern knowledge with strong values to preserve national unity. Honorary degrees were also conferred on SV Rajendra Singh Babu, T Sham Bhat, and P Jayachandra Raju. *—Salar News*

**COUNTING THE BEAST**

# *Tiger census begins across State*

**BIDAR, 5 JAN**

Karnataka Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre said the state-wide estimation of tigers and other carnivores began on Monday across all forest areas. The exercise covers major tiger reserves, including Kali, Bhadra, Nagarahole, Bandipur and Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple. Conducted once every four years, this is the sixth nationwide tiger estimation. Karnataka was last estimated to have about 563 tigers, ranking second nationally in tiger population.

"The estimation will be conducted in patrol areas across all 38 forest divisions and every forest range in the state," Khandre said. He added that teams of three members each will patrol about five km daily for three days starting from 5 January, collecting data such as pugmarks, scat and direct sightings of tigers, leopards, other carnivores and elephants.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

The second phase of the exercise will be held from 15 to 17 January, across 14 forest divisions, focusing on direct sightings of herbivorous animals such as deer, sambar, gaur and wild buffalo. In the third phase, camera traps will be installed at suitable locations based on carnivore data gathered during the first two phases, the minister said.

Tiger Project Director Ramesh Kumar has been named nodal officer to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) to oversee the estimation exercise. A total of 2,230 camera traps have been deployed across five tiger reserves, with surveys already underway. Noting increased tiger movement into human areas, the minister said the population appears to have risen, though exact numbers will be known after the exercise concludes. *—PTI*

## LULU'S BIGGEST SALE OF THE YEAR IS HERE: FLAT 50% OFF

The wait is over for savvy shoppers in Bengaluru. Lulu Bengaluru announces the city's most massive shopping spectacle of the year, the "End of Season Sale (EOSS)", on 8,9,10,11 January. This shopping bonanza promises a flat 50% off across products.

Shoppers can dive into unbeatable deals at Lulu Hypermarket, Lulu Fashion, Lulu Connect, at Lulu Mall Rajajinagar. Lulu Daily, Lulu Connect and REO Fashions stores located at VR Mall Whitefield. Lulu Daily at Forum Mall Falcon City, and Lulu Daily at M5 E-City Mall Electronic City. From the latest fashion trends and electronics to daily groceries, over 300+ leading brands are participating.

Lulu is also organising an auction from 8 to 11 January. Customers can bid for premium electronics, high-end appliances and gadgets, all starting from just Rs 1. Furthermore, all Lulu outlets will extend their shopping hours until midnight.

The flagship Lulu Mall Bengaluru at Rajaji Nagar will be the epicentre of the "LULU ON SALE - Hey Bengaluru Ready Na?" festival. Lulu Funtura, Karnataka's largest indoor amusement park, adds to the fun with an exclusive Bowling Challenge, where visitors can win amazing prizes.

The sale is further sweetened with Special Bank Offers up to 10% off on all major cards

ADVERTORIAL

## Nehru did not like Somnath Temple opening: Modi

**NEW DELHI, 5 JAN**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was not pleased with the opening of the Somnath Temple in 1951. Modi said 2026 marked 1,000 years since the first attack on the Somnath Temple took place and despite repeated attacks subsequently, the temple stands tall. "This is because Somnath's story is about the unbreakable courage of countless children of Bharat Mata who protected our civilisation," the prime minister said. He said it was the same spirit that was visible in the nation, which has emerged as one of the brightest spots of global growth, having overcome centuries of invasions and colonial loot. "It is our value systems that made India the centre of global attention today. The world sees India with optimism," he said. —*PTI*

## Mamata lays foundation for Sagar Island bridge

**SAGAR ISLAND, 5 JAN**

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee laid the foundation stone for a nearly 5km long bridge over the Muriganga River, aimed at connecting Sagar Island, host of the annual Gangasagar Mela. The 'Gangasagar Setu', costing Rs 1,670 crore, will provide all-weather road access to the island at the confluence of the Hooghly River and the Bay of Bengal. The bridge, contracted to Larsen & Toubro Ltd (L&T), is expected to be completed within two years, relieving the current ferry bottlenecks during peak pilgrimage times —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

## We must respect all languages: Chandrababu

**GUNTUR, 5 JAN**

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu addressed the fourth World Telugu Conference on Monday, emphasising the importance of respecting all languages. "No language is greater or lesser than another," he stated, noting that those who learn in their mother tongue often excel. While acknowledging the significance of English, he warned that neglecting one's mother tongue equates to losing one's identity. Naidu took pride in Telugu, highlighting its status as one of the six classical languages spoken by nearly 10 crore people. He announced the establishment of a Telugu university in Rajahmundry named after Potti Sriramulu, a key figure in the movement for a separate state for Telugu-speaking people —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

## Rahul & Revanth Reddy should be hanged, says KTR

**HYDERABAD, 5 JAN**

Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) working president KT Rama Rao stated that Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi "should be hanged many times" for misleading the people of Telangana. This response follows Reddy's criticism of BRS leader K Chandrashekar Rao regarding river water sharing issues. KTR cited Rahul's unfulfilled job promises and other broken commitments, emphasising that the Congress deserves public punishment for its 420 broken promises. He dismissed Reddy's comments as ignorant, claiming he lacks understanding of Telangana's needs and issues —*ANI*

# Mamata to move court against 'inhumane' SIR

### 'Fear and harassment have killed many in West Bengal'

**SAGAR ISLAND, 5 JAN**

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday said she would move court against the "inhumane" conduct of the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the state.

Addressing a public meeting in Sagar Island in South 24 Parganas district, she alleged that fear, harassment and administrative arbitrariness linked to the exercise had led to deaths and hospitalisations of several people.

"We are moving court tomorrow against the inhumane treatment and the death of so many people due to the SIR," she said.

"If allowed, I will also move the Supreme Court and plead as a commoner against this inhumane exercise. I am also a lawyer," she said.

She claimed that terminally ill people and elderly citizens were being forced to stand in long queues to prove they were legitimate voters.

Meanwhile, West Bengal's Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari, wrote to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, urging him to continue SIR "undaunted," two days after Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee sent a letter stating that the exercise should be halted.

Adhikari said the CM's call to "halt" the special intensive revision (SIR) is nothing short of an "admission of defeat," and a "brazen attempt to perpetuate the electoral malfeasance" that has defined her tenure. Meanwhile, the Election Commission has issued a notice to Trinamool Congress MP and actor Deepak Adhikari, popularly known as Dev, to appear for SIR hearing.

Notices have also been sent to three members of his family, they said. However, the date on which Dev and his family members are required to appear for the hearing has not yet been communicated, officials said. —*PTI*

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee waving to the public at a meeting PHOTO: PTI

US THREATENS MORE TARIFFS

# Modi hugging Trump did no good, says Cong

**NEW DELHI, 5 JAN**

The Congress on Monday took a swipe at the government over US President Donald Trump's remarks that Washington can raise tariffs on India "very quickly," saying all those "Namaste Trump, Howdy Modi events, forced hugs," and social media posts hailing the American leader have done very little good.

The opposition party's dig came after Trump said Prime Minister Narendra Modi knew he was not happy with India's purchases of Russian oil and that Washington can raise tariffs on New Delhi "very quickly."

In a post on X, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "The PM's good friend in the White House continues his 'blow hot, blow cold' approach to India. He has again threatened higher tariffs on US imports from India if India did not stop buying oil from Russia."

Trump, while talking to reporters on Sunday said, "They (India) wanted to make me happy. Modi is a good man. We can hike tariffs on them quickly. It would be very bad for them."

Trump's remarks came after US Senator Lindsey Graham, accompanying him on Air Force One, said that the tariffs imposed on India by Trump are the "chief reason" New Delhi is now buying substantially less Russian oil.

Trump said that the sanctions are hurting Russia very badly and then mentioned India. Graham then said that the US put a 25 per cent tariff on India for buying Russian oil. —*PTI*

## NEXT ASSEMBLY POLLS WILL DECIDE KERALA'S FUTURE: MANSOOR

**T'PURAM, 5 JAN**

The forthcoming Kerala Assembly polls is not just about the future of the Congress in Kerala, but about the future of Kerala itself, AICC Secretary Mansoor Ali Khan said on Monday.

"The booth is the final battlefield. Unity will be our greatest strength. Discipline must guide us. Compassion must shape our conversations. Conviction must define our election campaign," he added.

"Kerala is ready for change. The people will stand with us. And together, we will return to power in 2026," he concluded. Khan was addressing the Lakshya KPCC Leadership Summit in Kerala.

The summit was chaired by KPCC President Sunny Joseph and inaugurated by AICC General Secretary (Org) K C Venugopal and was led by AICC General Secretary Deepadas Munshi, Opposition Leader V D Satheesan and CWC Member Ramesh Chennitala along with AICC Secretaries and office bearers.—*Salar News*

## AAP leader shot dead at marriage venue

**AMRITSAR, 5 JAN**

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has issued strict instructions to the police to identify and arrest the culprits involved in the killing of an AAP leader and village sarpanch.

Police said Aam Aadmi Party leader and village sarpanch, Jharmal Singh, a resident of Valthoa village in Tarn Taran district, was attending a wedding in Amritsar when some assailants shot him point-blank on Sunday.

Singh was taken to a hospital, where he died, they said. The chief minister took an update on the matter from DGP Gaurav Yadav over the phone, and issued strict instructions for the swift identification and arrest of the culprits, sources said.

Police visited the spot and took CCTV footage and recorded the statements of eyewitnesses. In the CCTV footage of the incident, two men were seen walking into the venue, and one of them opened fire at the victim's head. —*PTI*

CIVIC POLLS

# MNS files petition in HC on unopposed wins, demands stay

**MUMBAI, 5 JAN**

A row over the "unopposed" victories of Mahayuti nominees ahead of civic polls landed in the Bombay High Court on Monday, with an MNS leader urging a stay on the declaration of results in 68 seats and a court-monitored inquiry into the "mass withdrawals" forced by coercion.

Avinash Jadhav, who heads the Thane unit of Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, alleged that opposition candidates were "forced, intimidated, or allured" into withdrawing their nomination papers through corrupt practices.

In a plea filed through advocate Asim Sarode, Jadhav demanded a court-monitored inquiry into the "mass withdrawals" and a stay on the declaration of results in 68 seats where the ruling BJP and Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena have claimed uncontested victories.

The petition will be taken up for hearing in due course.

The issue has been dominating the poll campaign for the January 15 elections to 29 municipal corporations, marked by tangled alliances and a huge number of aspirants.

A day before, Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray urged the State Election Commission to cancel results in 68 civic wards where ruling Mahayuti nominees were declared winners unopposed, saying uncontested victories effectively rob 'Gen Z' and first-time voters of their voting right.

Sharing the stage with MNS chief Raj Thackeray to unveil their joint manifesto for the upcoming polls to the Mumbai civic body, Uddhav warned that democracy must not be overrun by "mobocracy."

Countering Uddhav, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis had accused the Opposition of "finding excuses" in view of imminent defeat in polls.

Maharashtra Congress President Harshwardhan Sapkal demanded that voters should be allowed to exercise the NOTA option in civic wards where candidates are elected unopposed. PTI

# Telangana Jagruthi will contest Assembly polls, declares Kavitha

**HYDERABAD, 5 JAN**

During her last speech in the Telangana Legislative Assembly on Monday, K Kavitha announced that her outfit, Telangana Jagruthi, would contest the next Assembly elections, likely to be held in 2028 or 2029, and declared that a new political platform will emerge in the state.

Kavitha, Telangana Jagruthi's founder-President and former chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's daughter, recently submitted her resignation as a Member of the Legislative Council (MLC). However, Council Chairman Gutha Sukhender Reddy did not accept her resignation.

Following this, she requested the Chairman to give her an opportunity during the ongoing Legislative Council session to speak and explain the reasons for her decision.

Speaking in the Council on Monday, Kavitha attacked the BRS leadership, alleging that the party had turned into a political rehabilitation centre for those who betrayed the Telangana statehood movement.Speaking in an emotional tone, Kavitha, who was jailed in connection with the Delhi liquor scam case, alleged that the BRS did not support her when the CBI and Enforcement Directorate conducted raids.

She added that certain BRS leaders targeted her vindictively and forced her out of the party. Additionally, Kavitha hit out at her father's party, alleging corruption in Telangana during the previous party regime and also calling the BRS Constitution a "joke". Speaking in the Council, Kavitha, who was often overcome by emotions, also said she was not party to the unpopular decisions during the BRS rule. —*PTI*

# Delhi HC refuses to stay trial against Lalu Yadav

**NEW DELHI, 5 JAN**

The Delhi High Court on Monday refused to stay for now the trial against RJD leader Lalu Prasad Yadav, and asked the CBI to file its response to his plea challenging an order framing charges against him in the IRCTC scam case.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma said it cannot pass an order on the stay application without hearing or going through the reply of the probe agency.

The court issued a notice to the CBI on Yadav's petition, and stay application, and listed the matter for hearing on 14 January. It also called for the trial court record of the case.

During the brief hearing, senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Maninder Singh, representing Lalu Yadav, said they are seeking a stay on the trial court proceedings and two witnesses have been examined in a month.

The high court said it will consider the stay application on 14 January after the CBI files its reply.

"Let them file a reply. You should have come earlier, you didn't come. The trial court order was passed earlier," Justice Sharma said.

The CBI's counsel also sought time to file a reply in the matter.

On 13 October 2025, the trial court had framed charges against Lalu, his wife Rabri Devi, son Tejashwi and 11 others in the case for the offences of cheating, criminal conspiracy under the Indian Penal Code and the Prevention of Corruption Act. —*PTI*

## YOU DID NOT LEAVE GOD TOO, SC TELLS SABARIMALA ACCUSED

**NEW DELHI, 5 JAN**

The Supreme Court, which heard the Sabarimala gold theft case, made pointed remarks involving former Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) member KP Shankardas stating that the latter "did not even spare God," highlighting Shankardas's responsibility as he had signed the Devaswom Board's minutes.

The court declined to entertain his plea for the removal of five paragraphs from a Kerala High Court judgment that implicated him, alongside another board member, in the case. Shankardas argued that the High Court's statements were made without hearing his perspective and expressed concern about their impact on a fair investigation. He sought relief based on his age issues.

Advocate PB Suresh Kumar and advocate A Karthik represented him, while standing counsel CK Shashi defended the state. —*Agencies*

MURDER REASON NOT KNOWN

# *Hindu businessman shot dead in Bangladesh*

Bairagi PHOTO: X

**DHAKA, 5 JAN**

A Hindu businessman, who was also the acting editor of a newspaper, was shot dead by unidentified men on Monday in the Jessore district of Bangladesh, according to local media reports.

The deceased has been identified as a resident of Arua village in Keshabpur upazila of Jessore in Khulna Division, Bangla-language daily 'Prothom Alo' reported.

Bairagi, who owned an ice-making factory in Kopaliya Bazar in Monirampur, was also the acting editor of a newspaper named 'Dainik BD Khabar' published from Narail, the daily reported.

The incident occurred at around 5:45 pm at Kapalia Bazaar on Monday, Additional Police Superintendent Abul Basar was quoted as saying by the bdnews24 news portal.

Citing locals and the police, 'Prothom Alo' said that three miscreants on a motorcycle called him from the ice factory and took him to the alley in front of Kapalia Clinic and Diagnostic Centre on the west side of Kapalia Bazar.

The miscreants then shot him in the head from close range and fled. He died on the spot.

"Bairagi was shot three times in the head and his throat was slit," Monirampur Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md. Rajiullah Khan said.

Khan also said that the reason for his murder is not known. An investigation has been launched to find out who committed the murder.

Police said that there are four cases registered against the deceased in two police stations. However, details of these cases were not known.

The shooting marks the latest in a spate of violent incidents against the Hindu community members.

On 3 January Khokon Chandra Das, 50, died after he was brutally attacked, hacked and set on fire. —*PTI*

# SC allows Adani Power's appeal, quashes HC order

**NEW DELHI, 5 JAN**

The Supreme Court of India has set aside a 2019 ruling from the Gujarat High Court, which had denied relief to Adani Power Limited regarding customs duty levied on electrical energy generated at its Special Economic Zone (SEZ) power plant and supplied to the Domestic Tariff Area (DTA).

A bench comprised of Justices Aravind Kumar and NV Anjaria stated that the Gujarat High Court had previously, in July 2015, declared the customs duty on electrical energy supplied from the SEZ to the DTA as unconstitutional, effective from 26 June, 2009, to 15 September, 2010. The apex court noted that it had, in November 2015, chosen not to challenge this earlier ruling.

"We hold that once the 2015 judgment had declared the levy to be ultra vires... it was incumbent upon the administrative authorities to conform their conduct to that declaration," the bench remarked, emphasising that "Judicial pronouncements are not advisory opinions; they are binding commands of law." —*PTI*

## 5 days into 2026, Delhi continues to choke

**NEW DELHI, 5 JAN**

Delhi residents awoke to dense smog on Monday, with the average Air Quality Index (AQI) registering in the 'poor' category at 256. The Sameer app reported that 24 monitoring stations recorded poor air quality, with six others deemed 'very poor'. Notably, Chandni Chowk recorded highest AQI at 334. Central Pollution Control Board defines AQI categories as follows: 0-50 'good', 51-100 'satisfactory', 101-200 'moderate', 201-300 'poor', 301-400 'very poor', and 401-500 'severe'. Air Quality Early Warning System predictions indicate that Delhi's air quality will remain classified as 'very poor' for the next three days, continuing for the subsequent week. Locals can expect shallow fog in many areas with moderate fog in isolated spots during morning. *—PTI*

## 3 hurt after 5.1 earthquake jolts Assam

**GUWAHATI/MORIGAON, 5 JAN**

Three people were injured in an earthquake of 5.1 magnitude, which jolted central Assam's Morigaon district in the early hours of Monday at a depth of 50km, officials said. According to Assam State Disaster Management Authority, Joymoti Dewri, 80, a resident of Na Dalbori village in Mikirbheta circle, sustained a head injury while rushing out of her home and Manoj Kumar of the same village also sustained injuries who were admitted to the hospital. The earthquake could be felt in central-western Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and parts of Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and northern West Bengal, officials said. Central-eastern Bhutan, parts of China and Bangladesh were also shaken, reports said. *—PTI*

## 2 suspended for deaths of dialysis patients in Kerala

**ALAPPUZHA, 5 JAN**

The superintendent of a government taluk hospital and staff members have been booked for alleged medical negligence following the deaths of two dialysis patients. The incident stems from complaints by the family of Ramachandran, 60, who died after being transferred to another hospital post-treatment. The family alleged that both men developed severe infections due to unhygienic dialysis conditions. According to the FIR, the hospital staff were aware of the risks but neglected them. He died on 31 December, while the other patient, Majeed, died the previous day. The probe involves charges of endangering life & causing death by negligent acts. *—PTI*

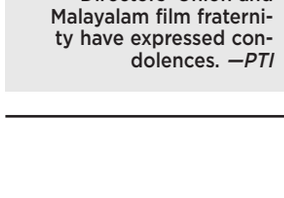


PHOTO: X

## Malayalam actor Kannan Pattambi dies

**PALAKKAD, 5 JAN**

Kannan Pattambi, a Malayalam film production controller and supporting actor, breathed his last on Monday. He was the younger brother of renowned director Major Ravi. In a heartfelt Facebook post, Ravi announced, "My beloved younger brother, Kannan Pattambi, a film production controller, attained his heavenly abode last night at 11.41pm." The cremation is scheduled for today at 4.00pm at the family residence in Pattambi. Kannan had a major impact on the industry, contributing to popular films like Pulimurugan and Odiyan, and was highly regarded for his skills. The FEFKA Directors' Union and Malayalam film fraternity have expressed condolences. *—PTI*

# Jail is my life now: Umar after bail denial

## Umar happy for others; Father says bail denial is unfortunate

**NEW DELHI, 5 JAN**

Activist Umar Khalid PHOTO: PTI

Activist Umar Khalid has said that prison has become his "life now", while expressing relief that some of his co-accused have been granted bail in the 2020 Delhi riots conspiracy case, according to his partner Banojyotsna Lahiri.

In a social media post, Lahiri recounted a conversation with Khalid following the Supreme Court's refusal to grant him bail.

"Umar said, 'I am really happy for the others, who got bail! So relieved'," she wrote. Lahiri added that when she told Khalid she would visit him in jail the next day, he replied, "Good good, aa jana. Ab yahi zindagi hai (Do come. This is my life now)."

Khalid's father, SQR Ilyas, described the Supreme Court's decision as "unfortunate", saying it was deeply disappointing that his son had been denied bail.

On Monday, the Supreme Court refused bail to activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in the 2020 Delhi riots conspiracy case, observing that there was a prima facie case against them under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

Sharjeel Imam was first arrested on 28 January, 2020, for speeches delivered during protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

He was later arrested in August 2020 in the larger conspiracy case. Umar Khalid was arrested on September 13, 2020.

All seven accused have been charged under the stringent UAPA, along with provisions of the Indian Penal Code, for allegedly being the "masterminds" behind the riots. Under Section 16 of the UAPA, a terrorist act resulting in death is punishable by death or life imprisonment, along with a fine.

Meanwhile, Sharjeel Imam's uncle Arshad Imam told reporters in Jehanabad, Bihar, that he was shocked.

"I had high hopes that the court would grant bail this time, as every point during the arguments indicated that Sharjeel is innocent. Still, as an Indian, I respect the verdict of the court," he said, expressing the hope his nephew would eventually be released on bail. *—PTI*

### KHALID AND IMAM DENIED BAIL MULTIPLE TIMES

Umar Khalid's bail pleas have been rejected on at least five separate occasions in different courts over the past five years. Khalid was not given a single proper bail hearing in 2023.

He was granted two short outings in 2024 and 2025 to attend weddings in his family. Sharjeel Imam's bail pleas have been rejected at least twice before. The activists told the court that they have been kept in the jail for five years without any proof of their involvement in the violence. They further added that this amounts to "punishment without trial". *—Salar News*

## 12 bail terms set for Gulfisha, others

Clockwise from top left: Gulfisha Fatima, Meeran Haider, Shifa ur Rehman, Shadab Ahmed, and Mohd Saleem Khan, the accused who got bail in the 2020 Delhi Riots case PHOTO: X

**NEW DELHI, 5 JAN**

Supreme Court on Monday granted bail to Gulfisha Fatima, Meeran Haider, Shifa ur Rehman, Shadab Ahmed, and Mohd Saleem Khan in the 2020 Delhi Riots case, imposing a series of strict conditions. While most are standard, two are notably unique: a ban on attending meetings or gatherings and a restriction on circulating banners, posters, or handbills in any form.

The bench said Fatima did not exercise independent command, resource control, or strategic oversight over multiple protest sites during the agitation against theCAA. The Court observed that she stands on different footing compared with alleged masterminds Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam. It further highlighted that she has been in custody for a substantial period, and no evidence indicates that her release would pose an irremediable risk that cannot be mitigated by bail conditions.

The Court emphasised that denying bail without distinguishing material would constitute hostile discrimination against similarly situated co-accused, violating Article 14 and the principle of parity.

The 12 bail conditions include: furnishing a personal bond of Rs 2 lakh with two local sureties of the same amount; remaining within Delhi; surrendering passports or filing affidavits; providing updated contact details; appearing twice weekly before the Crime Branch; avoiding contact with witnesses; not associating with relevant groups; refraining from disseminating statements about the case; abstaining from gatherings or rallies; and not circulating posts or handbills in any form.

The appellants must also attend every hearing, cooperate fully, and maintain peace and good behaviour. *—PTI*

## Oppn hits back as BJP seeks apology for backing 'tukde gang'

**NEW DELHI, 5 JAN**

The Supreme Court's decision to deny bail to activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in the 2020 Delhi riots case has triggered strong reactions from both the BJP and opposition parties.

The BJP hailed the verdict as a "big slap" on the Congress, accusing the party of portraying Khalid and Imam as "innocent victims" to protect the so-called "tukde-tukde gang". Party spokespersons Poonawalla and Pradeep Bhandari called on Congress to apologise for backing individuals they described as "poster boys of divisive forces" and "urban Naxals".

> **We welcome the court's decision. Those who pushed Delhi into the fire of riots should receive the strictest possible punishment**
>
> —Rekha Gupta, Delhi Chief Minister

Opposition leaders, however, criticised the bail denial, highlighting what they called selective justice. CPI(M) MP John Brittas pointed out that Khalid has spent over five years in pre-trial detention under the UAPA, while convicted rapist Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh has repeatedly been granted parole, including a 40-day release on Monday. The CPI(M) called the prolonged incarceration "against natural justice" and a sign of repression of dissent.

RJD MP Manoj Jha said the verdict raises "troubling questions" about how long constitutional protections should wait before being enforced, noting the delay in trial and extended pre-trial detention. *—PTI*

Smoke and flames billow after a gas pipeline leak at a well triggered a fire, in Dr BR Ambedkar Konaseema district, in Andhra Pradesh PHOTO: PTI

## Gas leak at ONGC well in Andhra sparks fire

**MORI, 5 JAN**

A gas leak at an ONGC well here in Dr BR Ambedkar Konaseema district operated by its production contractor sparked an inferno on Monday, leading to the evacuation of two villages within a four-km radius.

However, no casualties have been reported so far, an official of the Maharatna public sector company said.

"The fire occurred due to a gas pipeline leakage at the Mori-5 well, which is operated by Deep Industries Ltd as part of production enhancement operations," an ONGC official told PTI.

Residents of neighbouring Irusumanda and Lakkavaram villages were evacuated to safer locations. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu inquired about the fire accident and directed officials to prioritise dousing the flames.

Senior officials of the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) from Rajahmundry rushed to Well Mori-5 located in Malkipuram mandal to assess the situation.

Initially, a thick white cloud of gas blanketed the surrounding paddy fields and coconut groves.The gas eventually ignited, creating a towering inferno that could be seen across the Godavari River delta. *—PTI*

## Ram Rahim walks out of jail for 40 days

**CHANDIGARH, 5 JAN**

Dera Sacha Sauda chief **Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh**, serving a 20-year jail term for raping two of his disciples, walked out of Sunaria jail in Rohtak on Monday after he was granted a 40-day parole, the 15th parole after his conviction in 2017.

Singh will stay at his Sirsa-headquartered Dera during the 40-day period, said Dera spokesperson and advocate Jitender Khurana.

Singh and three others were also convicted in 2019 for the murder of a journalist more than 16 years ago.

He last stepped out of prison on a 40-day parole in August 2025. He was granted a 21-day furlough in April 2025 and a 30-day parole in January 2025, ahead of the 5 February Delhi Assembly polls.

He was freed on a 20-day parole on 1 October 2024, days before the 5 October Haryana Assembly polls.

In August 2024, Singh was granted a 21-day furlough. He was also permitted a three-week furlough from 7 February 2022, barely two weeks before the Punjab Assembly polls. Sikh organisations like the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, have criticised the relief granted to Singh.

In May 2024, the Punjab and Haryana High Court acquitted Singh and four others in the 2002 murder of the sect's former manager, Ranjit Singh, citing "tainted and sketchy" investigations and overturned a CBI court order sentencing them to life imprisonment.

The CBI had held Singh guilty of hatching a conspiracy with his co-accused. *—PTI*

## 142 hospitalised, 20 new diarrhoea cases in Indore

**INDORE, 5 JAN**

Around 142 persons are hospitalised, including 11 in ICUs, due to an outbreak of diarrhoea caused by contaminated drinking water in Indore. 20 new patients were found during a screening of 9,000 people in Bhagirathpura, the ground zero of the infection.

Health teams examined 9,416 individuals from 2,354 households during a survey in Bhagirathpura, where six persons lost their lives and identified 20 fresh cases, officials said on Sunday. 398 patients have been hospitalised so far after the outbreak. Of them, 256 patients have been discharged. They stated that 142 patients are currently undergoing treatment in hospitals, including 11 admitted to ICUs. The outbreak is under control now, they added.

A person stands near exposed water pipelines in the Bhagirathpura area, in Indore, Madhya Pradesh PHOTO: PTI

Chief Medical and Health Officer Dr Madhav Prasad Haasani said a team from the Kolkata-based National Institute for Research in Bacterial Infections (NIRBI) has arrived in Indore to probe the crisis. He said experts from NIRBI are providing technical support to the health department to contain the outbreak. The administration has confirmed six deaths so far. Mayor Pushyamitra Bhargava had put the death toll at 10, whereas locals claimed that 16 people, including a six-month-old child, died due to the diarrhoea outbreak. *— PTI*

### Indore: Woman likely diagnosed with GBS

**INDORE, 5 JAN**

A 67-year-old woman from Bhagirathpura reportedly showed Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS)-like symptoms due to diarrhoea outbreak triggered by contaminated drinking water in Indore and is battling for her life in a hospital. However, the administration on Monday rejected reports of any GBS case in the affected area.

The woman, Parvati Kondla, had earlier been admitted to another hospital, where doctors, based on test reports, indicated GBS-like symptoms, according to an official of a private hospital. *—PTI*

**'SAMUDRA PRATAP'**

## *Rajnath unveils pollution control vessel*

**PANAJI, JAN 5**

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday commissioned the Indian Coast Guard's (ICG) first indigenously designed and built pollution control vessel, 'Samudra Pratap', at GSL, Vasco, in South Goa.

The 114.5-metre vessel, built by the Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL), has over 60 per cent of indigenous content.

The 4,200-tonne vessel boasts a speed of more than 22 knots and an endurance of 6,000 nautical miles, officials said.

It will serve as a critical platform for enforcing marine pollution control regulations, maritime law enforcement, search and rescue operations, and safeguarding India's Exclusive Economic Zone.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during commissioning of the ICG first pollution control vessel 'Samudra Pratap' in Goa PHOTO: PTI

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said, "The occasion is connected to India's great maritime vision. "I am happy that, keeping this vision in mind, the Coast Guard has given due attention to women's empowerment," he said.

"India believes that marine resources are not the property of any one country; they are the shared heritage of humanity," he said adding, "When heritage is shared, its responsibility is also shared. This is why India has today become a responsible maritime power."

The commissioning of 'Samudra Pratap' marks a major step forward in India's pursuit of 'atmanirbharta' in shipbuilding and maritime capability development, the ICG said in a statement.

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, Union Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and ICG Director General Paramesh Sivamani were present on the occasion. *—PTI*

## OPD services across Odisha hit as doctors boycott work

**BHUBANESWAR, 5 JAN**

PHOTO: X

Services in the Outpatient department across state-run hospitals in Odisha were affected on Monday morning as doctors boycotted work for two hours over a host of issues, including filling up of over 50 per cent of vacant posts and pay parity with their central government counterparts.

Members of the Odisha Medical Service Association (OMSA) boycotted outpatient services from 9 am to 11 am, demanding that the government fulfil their 10-point charter of demands.

OMSA president Kishore Mishra said the doctors have been agitating since November 20.

"In the first phase, the doctors joined work wearing black badges, and from December 26, boycotted the OPD service for one hour. They further extended the OPD boycott to two hours from today," he said.

"Emergency services, inpatient care, and surgeries will remain unaffected. Now on, OPDs will remain closed from 9 am to 11 am daily, from primary health centres to district headquarters hospitals," he added.

Health Minister Mukesh Mahaling appealed to the doctors to shun agitation as the government was "sympathetically considering" their demands. *—PTI*

## UNDERDOGS GET AN UPDATE

Indian Army personnel with a robot dog during a rehearsal ahead of the Army Day celebrations, in Jaipur. Army Day is a military tradition celebrated on 15 January of every year. This day honours the bravery and sacrifices made by the Indian soldiers. On this day, the soldiers will display a parade at the Cariappa Parade Ground in New Delhi
***PHOTO: PTI***

# WB SIR: Vulnerable voters endure physical distress

As the second phase of the SIR gathers pace in West Bengal, block offices are turning into sites of anxiety, with elderly, disabled and vulnerable voters enduring physical distress, long journeys and loss of livelihood to prove they are "legitimate" electors, sharpening political fault lines ahead of the assembly polls.

Across rural and urban Bengal, scenes at hearing centres have transformed what was intended as a technical exercise into a deeply emotive public issue.

Octogenarians arriving on stretchers or leaning on relatives, persons with disabilities crawling across office floors, and daily wage earners forfeiting income out of fear that their names may be struck off the electoral rolls have exposed a widening gap between administrative intent and ground reality.

SIR hearings in West Bengal brings vulnerable voters hoping to prove they are 'legitimate' electors ***PHOTO: PTI***

From an 87-year-old woman ferried 32km for a hearing, to a man with 80 per cent disability forced to crawl inside a block office, to an eight-month pregnant woman summoned despite exemptions, the hearings have thrown up images that critics say belie claims of a routine clean-up of voter lists. On 16 December, the Election Commission (EC) published the draft electoral rolls after the first phase of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), with the electorate dropping from 7.66 crore to 7.08 crore following the deletion of over 58 lakh names.

The second phase, which began on 27 December, involves hearings of 1.67 crore electors under scrutiny, including 1.36 crore flagged for logical discrepancies and 31 lakh whose records lack mapping.

In Debra block of Paschim Medinipur, 87-year-old Sneholata Bhakta arrived for her hearing after a 32-km journey by car. Seeing her frail condition, the block development officer stepped out, verified her documents inside the vehicle and allowed her to leave.

"Why should I spend money and suffer so much just to prove I am a voter?" she asked.

Nearby, 65-year-old Jharna Das, seriously ill and unable to walk, was carried into the hearing centre in her brother's arms.

"If we didn't come, her name might be deleted," he said.

Fear, rather than confusion over paperwork, has emerged as the dominant driver behind attendance.

Notices warning of deletion, coupled with unclear timelines for home verification, have pushed even those physically incapable of travel to turn up in person.

Dipankar Das, blind since birth, was summoned despite his name featuring in the 2002 electoral rolls. "I cannot see. I walk very carefully," he said after navigating the BDO office with help.

The absence of names from the 2002 rolls has emerged as a recurring trigger for summons, disproportionately affecting migrant workers, urban renters, women who shifted residence after marriage and elderly voters who were outside their home districts at the time.

From Garfa in south Kolkata, a retired central government employee travelled nearly 150km to Dantan after finding his name missing from the 2002 list.

For daily wage earners, the cost has been immediate.

Shyamal Kotal, a mason from Narayangarh, skipped work to attend his hearing. "My family survives on my daily wages," he said.

In Purulia's Balarampur, Shyam Singh Sardar, 80 per cent disabled since birth, crawled across the block office floor after being summoned. There was no wheelchair. "At least home hearings should be arranged for people like us," he said. "This is unbearable harassment."

In Hooghly's Tarakeswar, a 72-year-old man collapsed while stepping out of a toto to attend his hearing and suffered a head injury. The same centre also summoned an eight-month pregnant woman despite guidelines exempting such categories.

In Jalpaiguri's Dhupguri, an octogenarian couple, both unwell, reached a hearing centre clutching voter cards and notices.

While the EC's guidelines provide for home hearings and exemptions, repeated instances of vulnerable voters being summoned have highlighted gaps in implementation, with families often receiving verbal assurances but written notices demanding physical presence.

The ruling TMC has seized on these episodes, alleging that the SIR risks disenfranchising genuine voters ahead of 2026.

The BJP, however, insists the revision is necessary to ensure transparency and integrity in the electoral rolls and should not be politicised.

At its core, the SIR is a technical exercise. On the ground, it has become deeply personal-measured in kilometres travelled by the infirm, wages lost by labourers and fear etched on faces lining up outside block offices.

For an exercise meant to correct records, the SIR has unsettled something less easily repaired: voter confidence.

As the process continues amid concern, the administration now faces the challenge of keeping electoral rolls accurate without shaking public trust in voting. —PTI

SALAR ساڵار

# Siddaramaiah set to be the longest serving K'taka CM

SSet to surpass D Devaraj Urs as the longest serving Chief Minister of Karnataka on 6 January, Siddaramaiah on Monday credited the historic milestone to the blessings of the people.

Highlighting a key difference between himself and Urs, he said that while Urs belonged to the ruling class, he hailed from the socially backward community (Kuruba or shepherd).

Addressing reporters here, he said, "With the blessings of the people, tomorrow late D Devaraj Urs' record of being the longest serving Chief Minister of Karnataka will be broken. The matter of pride is that I and Urs belong to Mysuru."

Asked whether he had ever imagined that he would ever break the record, he admitted that he had never imagined even becoming a Minister, let alone the CM.

"I had only thought that I will be an MLA after becoming the Taluk Board member. I have so far won eight elections. I lost two Parliament elections and two assembly elections. In my life, I have contested in 13 elections, including Taluk elections," Siddaramaiah said.

On his comparison with Urs, he said, "Devaraj Urs was not socially backward. In fact, he was from a forward class, the ruling class. He was from a community which is less in population, but he was a popular leader."

The Chief Minister said there is no comparison between him and Urs.

Noting that the era of Urs was different from the present, Siddaramaiah said Devaraj Urs contested elections by collecting money directly from the people.

"People gave him money and votes in 1962. Time has now changed," he said.

To a query about whether there is any chance of breaking his record, Siddaramaiah said records are meant for breaking.

Using a sports analogy, he compared his feat to Virat Kohli breaking Sachin Tendulkar's record in cricket.

"I never said that no one will break my record. Someone may emerge to break my record of the longest serving Chief Minister or the one who presented the maximum budgets."

Siddaramaiah has so far presented 16 budgets.

On budget preparations, the Chief Minister said it will start after Makara Sankranti.

In response to another question on 'Sadhana Samavesha' (celebration of the achievement), Siddaramaiah said, "State Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda is planning something, but I don't have any details as such. I will speak to him."

Regarding the cabinet reshuffle, Siddaramaiah said, "It has to be done. I will speak to Rahul Gandhi whenever he calls me. I have told him that I will speak to him in January."

Referring to the Ballari clashes, the Chief Minister said he would discuss it with State Home Minister Parameshwara on Tuesday.

When he was told that the firing took place reportedly by the gunman of Congress MLA Bharath Reddy, Siddaramaiah said, "Let the investigation be completed. We will get to know after the investigation is over.

Reacting to the BJP's demand for a judicial probe by a sitting High Court judge, the Chief Minister said he will speak after the investigations are completed.

Regarding GST compensation to Karnataka, Siddaramaiah said a grave injustice is happening to the state government.

"The state is incurring a loss of Rs 12,000 crore to Rs 15,000 crore a year. Earlier, the Centre was giving the entire money for MGNREGA, which was started by the Manmohan Singh government. Now the Centre has repealed the MNREGA and introduced VB-G-RAM-G.

"Earlier, people were supposed to get 100 days' work and right to livelihood was the fundamental right, but now that right has been snatched. It is totally wrong. It's unconstitutional," the Chief Minister said.

Under the VB-G-RAM-G, the Centre will pay 60 per cent while the state has to contribute 40 per cent, resulting in an expenditure of Rs 3,000 crore a year for the state government, he added.

He alleged that the Centre wants to destroy the scheme meant to support poor people. —*PTI*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah inaugurated the Karnataka Kumbarara Maha Sammelana at Kalamandir, in Mysuru, on Monday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

## LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

# *US capture of Maduro thrills Trump supporters, worries foes*

In his celebratory news conference on the US capture of Venezuelan strongman leader Nicolas Maduro, President Donald Trump set out an extraordinarily forthright view of the use of US power in Latin America that exposed political divisions from Mexico to Argentina as Trump-friendly leaders rise across the region.

"American dominance in the Western Hemisphere will never be questioned again," Trump proclaimed just hours before Maduro was perp-walked through the offices of the US Drug Enforcement Administration in New York.

The scene marked a stunning culmination of months of escalation in Washington's confrontation with Caracas that has reawakened memories of a past era of blatant US interventionism in the region.

Since assuming office less than a year ago — and promptly renaming the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America — Trump has launched boat strikes against alleged drug traffickers in the Caribbean, ordered a naval blockade on Venezuelan oil exports and meddled in elections in Honduras and Argentina.

Through a combination of tariffs, sanctions and military force, he has pressured Latin American leaders to advance his administration's goals of combating drug trafficking, halting immigration, securing strategic natural resources and countering the influence of Russia and China.

The new, aggressive foreign policy — which Trump now calls the "Donroe Doctrine," in reference to 19th-century President James Monroe's belief that the US should dominate its sphere of influence — has carved the hemisphere into allies and foes.

"The Trump administration in multiple different ways has been trying to reshape Latin American politics," said Gimena Sanchez, Andes director for the Washington Office on Latin America, a think tank. "They're showing their teeth in the whole region."

First moments of Nicolás Maduro arriving in New York where he will appear in front of a US court on narcoterrorism charges ***PHOTO: SCREENGRAB***

### REGIONAL DIVISIONS ON DISPLAY

Saturday's dramatic events — including Trump's vow that Washington would "run" Venezuela and seize control of its oil sector — galvanised opposite sides of the polarised continent.

Argentine President Javier Milei, Trump's ideological soulmate, characterised one side as supporting "democracy, the defence of life, freedom and property."

"On the other side," he added, "are those accomplices of a narco-terrorist and bloody dictatorship that has been a cancer for our region."

Other right-wing leaders in South America similarly seized on Maduro's ouster to declare their ideological affinity with Trump.

In Ecuador, conservative President Daniel Noboa issued a stern warning for all followers of Hugo Chavez, Maduro's mentor and the founder of the Bolivarian revolution: "Your structure will completely collapse across the entire continent."

In Chile, where a presidential election last month marked by fears over Venezuelan immigration brought down the leftist government, far-right President-elect José Antonio Kast hailed the US raid as "great news for the region."

But left-wing presidents in Latin America — including Brazil's Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Mexico's Claudia Sheinbaum, Chile's Gabriel Boric and Colombia's Gustavo Petro — expressed grave concerns over what they saw as US bullying.

Lula said the raid set "an extremely dangerous precedent." Sheinbaum warned it "jeopardises regional stability." Boric said it "violated an essential pillar of international law." Petro called it "aggression against the sovereignty of Venezuela and of Latin America."

Trump has previously punished or threatened all four leaders for failing to fall in line with his demands, while boosting and bailing out allies who show loyalty.

### THE ATTACK RECALLS A PAINFUL HISTORY

For Lula — among the last surviving icons of the so-called "pink tide," the leftist leaders who dominated Latin American politics from the turn of the 21st century — Trump's military action in Venezuela recalls the worst moments of interference in the politics of Latin America."

The historical echoes in Maduro's downfall fuelled not only harsh condemnations and street protests among Trump's left-wing opponents but also uneasy responses from some of his close allies.

Usually effusive in his support for Trump, President Nayib Bukele was oddly quiet in El Salvador, a nation still scarred by a brutal civil war between a repressive US-allied government and leftist guerrillas. He posted a meme mocking Maduro after his capture Saturday, but expressed none of the jubilation seen from regional counterparts.

In Bolivia, where old anti-American dogmas die hard due to memories of the bloody US-backed war on drugs, new conservative President Rodrigo Paz praised Maduro's removal, since it fulfilled "the true popular will" of Venezuelans who tried to vote the autocrat out of office in a 2024 election widely seen as fraudulent.

His message didn't age well. Hours later, Trump announced he would work with Maduro's loyalist vice president, Delcy Rodriguez, rather than the opposition that prevailed in the 2024 election.

When asked on Sunday about when Venezuela will hold democratic elections, Trump responded: "I think we're looking more into getting it fixed."

### TRUMP PUTS ENEMIES ON NOTICE

The Trump administration's attack on Venezuela extends its broader crusade to assemble a column of allied — or at least acquiescent — governments in Latin America, sailing with the political winds blowing in much of the region.

Recent presidential elections from Chile to Honduras have elevated tough, Trump-like leaders who oppose immigration, prioritise security and promise a return to better, bygone eras free of globalisation and "wokeness."

"The president is going to be looking for allied and partner nations in the hemisphere who share his kind of broader ideological affinity," said Alexander Grey, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, a Washington research institute.

Those who don't share that ideology were put on notice this weekend. Trump said Cuba's Communist government "looks like it's ready to fall." He slammed Sheinbaum's failure to root out Mexican cartels, saying that "something's going to have to be done with Mexico." He repeated allegations that Petro "likes making cocaine" and warned that "he's not going to be doing it very long." —*PTI*

PHOTO: IMDB

## Actor Rourke uses GoFundMe to avoid eviction

**LOS ANGELES, 5 JAN**

Oscar-nominated actor Mickey Rourke launched a GoFundMe page to avoid eviction from his Los Angeles home. The actor's GoFundMe campaign, titled "Help Mickey Rourke Stay in His Home," has raised USD 19,819 toward USD 100,000 goal. According to sources, Rourke has been served notice to pay close to USD 60,000 in back rent or face eviction. The 73-year-old actor, best known for The Wrestler, which earned him a Best Actor Oscar nomination in 2009, said that after leaving acting for boxing, he suffered physical and emotional scars and felt cast aside by the industry. His situation underscores that fame does not protect against hardship nor guarantee stability. *—PTI*

## North Korea tests hypersonic missiles

**SEOUL, 5 JAN**

North Korea said on Monday that its leader Kim Jong Un observed test-flights of hypersonic missiles and underscored the need to bolster the country's nuclear deterrent, as the country dials up weapon displays ahead of its major political conference. North Korea reported on the drill a day after its neighbours said they detected multiple ballistic missile launches and accused the North of provocations. The tests came just hours before South Korean President Lee Jae Myung departed for China for a summit with President Xi Jinping. The official Korean Central News Agency said Sunday's drill involving a hypersonic weapon system was meant to examine its readiness. *—PTI*

## Paris court convicts 10 for 1st Lady's cyberbullying

**PARIS, 5 JAN**

A Paris court on Monday found 10 people guilty of cyberbullying France's first lady, Brigitte Macron. The court convicted the defendants, eight men and two women aged 41 to 65, to sentences ranging from a cyberbullying awareness training to 8-month prison sentences. The court highlighted false claims that Brigitte is transgender and a pedophile, stemming from conspiracy theories linking her to her brother's name. France's President Emmanuel Macron, 48, first met at the high school where he was a student and she was a teacher. Brigitte is 24 years older than her husband. The Macrons have also filed a defamation suit in the US against conservative influencer Candace Owens. *—PTI*

## Anne Frank's stepsister dies at age 96

**LONDON, 5 JAN**

Auschwitz survivor Eva Schloss, the stepsister of teenage diarist Anne Frank and a tireless educator about the of the Holocaust, passed away at 96. The Anne Frank Trust UK, which Schloss was honorary president, said she died Saturday in London, where she lived. Born Eva Geiringer in Vienna in 1929, Schloss fled with her family to Amsterdam after Nazi Germany annexed Austria. She became friends with another Jewish girl of the same age, Anne Frank, whose diary would become one of the most famous chronicles of the Holocaust. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

# After Venezuela, Trump eyes Greenland

## Claims Greenland is needed from national security standpoint

**WASHINGTON, 5 JAN**

US President Donald Trump has again said the United States needs Greenland for national security, a day after US's capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro.

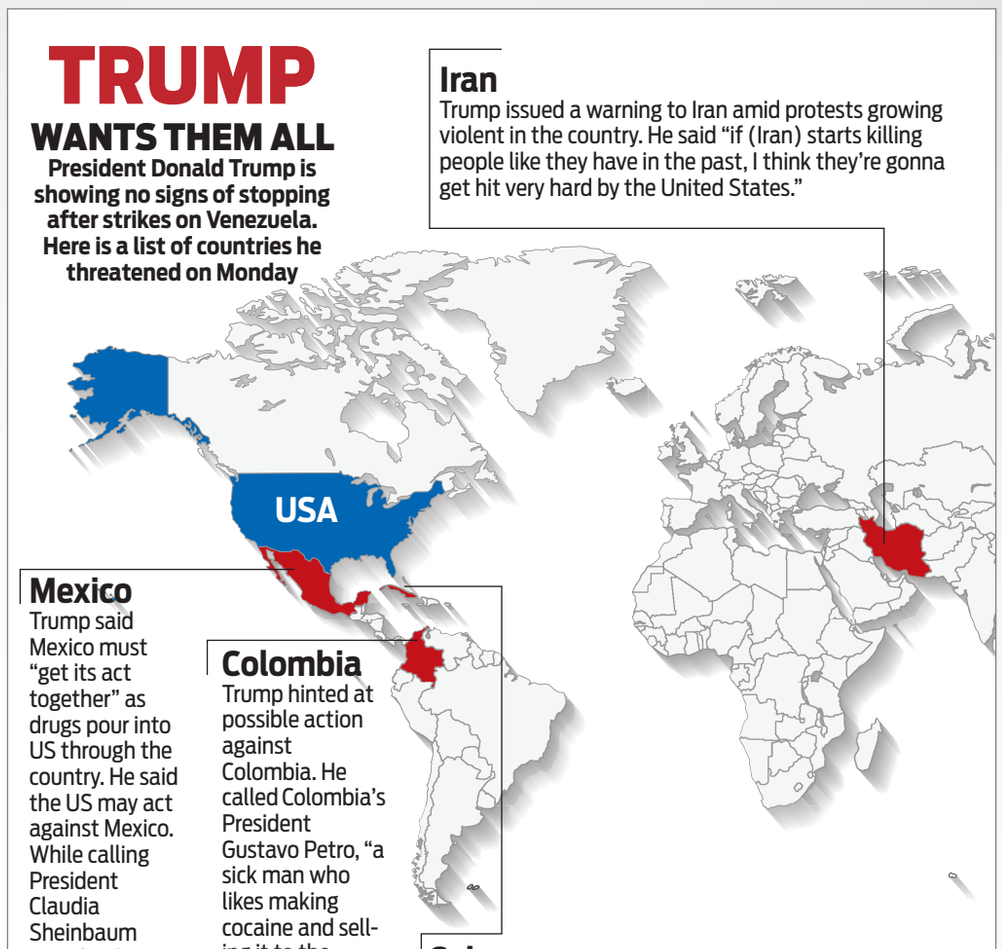
Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One on Sunday, Trump said Greenland was vital to US security because of the growing presence of Russia and China in the Arctic. "We need Greenland... It's strategic right now. Greenland is covered with Russian and Chinese ships all over the place," he said, adding that Denmark would be unable to protect it. Trump also claimed European support.

Trump repeated his position earlier in an interview, arguing that Greenland's Arctic location and reserves of critical minerals made it essential for US defense. He has advocated annexing the, resource-rich island, a self-governing Denmark.

Denmark and Greenland have consistently rejected the idea. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen strongly criticised Trump's remarks, urging Washington to stop making threats. "It makes absolutely no sense to talk about the need for the United States to take over Greenland," she said, stressing that the US had no right to annex any part of the Danish kingdom.

Tensions escalated after a social media post by Katie Miller, wife of Trump's deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller, showing Greenland painted in US flag colours with the word "SOON". Denmark's ambassador to the US, Jesper Moeller Soerensen, demanded respect for Denmark's territorial integrity, noting that Copenhagen boosted Arctic security in 2025.

Greenland Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen condemned the post, saying Greenland is not for sale and its future is rooted in international law. *—PTI*


TRUMP
WANTS THEM ALL
President Donald Trump is showing no signs of stopping after strikes on Venezuela. Here is a list of countries he threatened on Monday
Iran
Trump issued a warning to Iran amid protests growing violent in the country. He said "if (Iran) starts killing people like they have in the past, I think they're gonna get hit very hard by the United States."
USA
Mexico
Trump said Mexico must "get its act together" as drugs pour into US through the country. He said the US may act against Mexico. While calling President Claudia Sheinbaum "terrific", he said he repeatedly offered to send troops to Mexico.
Colombia
Trump hinted at possible action against Colombia. He called Colombia's President Gustavo Petro, "a sick man who likes making cocaine and selling it to the United States. And he's not going to be doing it very long."
Cuba
Tensions have risen in Cuba, a Venezuelan ally. Trump said Cuba's economy may collapse after Maduro's removal, citing lost oil supplies. The US sanctions on Cuba are in place since 1959.

## CHINA CALLS US A BULLY, AGAIN

**BEIJING, 5 JAN**

China condemned the US's forcible control of deposed dictator Nicolas Maduro and his wife, warning against unilateral bullying and asserting that no nation has the authority to act as an "international judge". China rejects imposing one country's will on another, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Sunday during the China-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue. Yi said international law must fully protect sovereignty. Adding, China is committed to working with the international community, including Pakistan, to uphold the UN Charter to respect sovereignty. Maduro was captured during a Saturday military operation and is now in American custody. US President Donald Trump said the US needs full access to Venezuela's oil. China, the world's largest crude oil importer, is Venezuela's biggest creditor and a major player in the country's oil sector. Despite US sanctions and declining output, China continues to buy Venezuelan oil, often through loan-for-oil agreements. *—ANI*

## US pushes oil majors to invest big in Venezuela

US officials told American oil executives they must return quickly to Venezuela and invest heavily to revive its oil industry if they want compensation for assets seized two decades ago, sources said. In the 2000s, Venezuela seized assets from firms that refused PDVSA control. Chevron stayed via joint ventures. Exxon and ConocoPhillips left and sought arbitration, claiming $1.65 billion and $12 billion respectively. After Maduro's capture, Trump said US firms were ready to return.

## Maduro's son hints at betrayal from within

Nicolás Maduro's son, Nicolás Maduro Guerra, said "history will tell who the traitors were", warning of possible betrayal within the ruling movement. In an audio message, the PSUV lawmaker said Chavismo would remain united, urging supporters to mobilise on 4 and 5 January. He called for political and military coordination against what "external aggression", saying the ruling camp was hurt but ready to take to the streets.

Federal agents escort Nicolas Maduro to a New York City courthouse for his arraignment on narco-terrorism charge *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

## Maduro is set to make his 1st appearance in court

**NEW YORK, 5 JAN**

Deposed Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro will make his first appearance in a US court on Monday, facing narco-terrorism charges that the Trump administration cited to justify his capture and transfer to New York.

Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, are expected to appear at noon before a judge in Manhattan in a brief but mandatory hearing, likely opening a lengthy legal fight over whether he can be tried in the United States. They will be brought from a Brooklyn jail to a courthouse near where President Donald Trump was convicted in 2024.

As a defendant, Maduro will have the same rights as any accused, including a jury trial. His lawyers are expected to challenge the legality of his arrest, arguing he is immune from prosecution as a sovereign head of state. US authorities, however, do not recognise him as Venezuela's legitimate leader following his disputed 2024 re-election. A similar immunity claim failed for Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega after his capture in 1990.

Venezuela's interim president, Delcy Rodríguez, has demanded Maduro's return, though she later signalled willingness to seek "respectful relations" with Washington.

A 25-page indictment accuses Maduro of conspiring with drug cartels to ship large quantities of cocaine to the US, charges carrying potential life sentences. *—PTI*

# US strike killed 32 Cubans, 40 Venezuelan officers

**CARACAS/HAVANA/ WASHINGTON, 5 JAN**

At least 40 people, including Venezuelan military personnel and civilians, were killed in a large-scale US strike on Venezuela early Saturday, while Cuba said 32 of its officers also died during the operation.

According to The New York Times, citing a senior Venezuelan official, Washington carried out coordinated strikes that led to the capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, who were seized in Caracas and flown out of the country. The operation involved US intelligence agencies and law enforcement.

President Donald Trump told Fox News that there were only "a few injuries" and no US fatalities, praising the professionalism of American forces.

Cuba confirmed on Sunday that 32 Cuban military and police officers were killed during the US operation. Havana said the officers were in Venezuela on a mission requested by its government. Cuba announced two days of mourning, with President Miguel Díaz-Canel and former leader Raúl Castro sending condolences. Names and ranks were not disclosed.

Trump acknowledged Cuban casualties, saying "there was a lot of death on the other side". US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Cuban officials played a central role in Maduro's security apparatus.

Meanwhile, Delcy Rodríguez was sworn in as Venezuela's acting president. Trump warned she must give the US "total access" or face consequences "probably worse than Maduro". *—PTI*

A man holds a picture of NicolÃs Maduro during a protest, in front of the US Embassy in Madrid on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

- President Donald Trump told Fox News that there were only "a few injuries" and no US fatalities, praising the professionalism of American forces.

# Ukraine didn't target Putin residence, confirms Trump

**WASHINGTON, 5 JAN**

US officials have confirmed that Ukraine did not target the residence belonging to Russian President Vladimir Putin in a drone attack last week, disputing Kremlin's claims that Trump had initially reacted to with deep concern, President Donald Trump told reporters on Sunday.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov last week said Ukraine launched drones at Putin's residence in the Novgorod region that the Russian defence systems were able to neutralise. Lavrov also criticised Kyiv for launching the attack when negotiations are on to end the war.

The allegation came just a day after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had travelled to Florida for talks with Trump on the US administration's 20-point plan aimed at ending the war. Zelenskyy denied the Kremlin's allegation.

Trump said that "something happened near" Putin's residence, but that American officials didn't find that the Russian president's residence was targeted.

Trump spoke about the US findings after European officials argued that the Russian claim was an attempt to undermine peace.

But Trump had appeared to take the Russian allegations at face value. He told reporters last Monday that Putin had also raised the matter during a call he had with the Russian leader earlier that day. And Trump commented that he was "very angry" about the accusation. *— PTI*

**EXPAT MURDER CASE**

# *Indian woman killed in US, beau arrested in Tamil Nadu*

**LAS VEGAS/NEW YORK, 5 JAN**

A 27-year old Indian woman, who was reported missing last week, was found dead in the Columbia, Maryland. According to sources, Interpol has tracked and arrested the former boyfriend in Tamil Nadu following coordination with US police agencies

Nikitha Godishala of Ellicott City was reported missing on 2 January. Howard County police said on Sunday that she was found deceased with stab wounds in the apartment of her ex-boyfriend Arjun Sharma, 26.

Police have obtained a warrant for Sharma's arrest on first and second-degree murder charges.

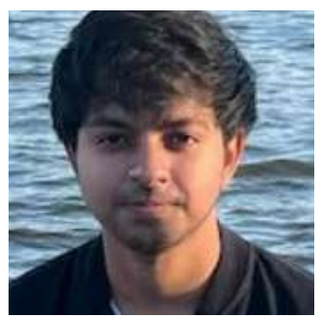
The Indian Embassy in Washington DC said in a post on X that it is in contact with Godishala's family and is extending all possible consular assistance.

Authorities said that Sharma made the missing person report to police and said he last saw her on 31 December in his apartment in Maryland.

Police later found that on the day the report was filed, that is, 2 January, Sharma left on a flight to India. The next day, detectives executed a search warrant for his apartment and located Godishala deceased.

Detectives say Sharma killed Godishala sometime after 7 pm on 31 December.

The investigation is on-going but no motive is known at this time, Howard County police said, adding that they are working with the United States federal law enforcement to arrest Sharma. *—PTI*



Nikitha Godishala was found deceased in her ex-boyfriend, Arjun Sharma's apartment *PHOTO: X*

- Sources say, Interpol has tracked and arrested the Sharma in Tamil Nadu, following coordination with US federal police.

## Guinea's junta leader elected Prez in first polls since coup

**CONAKRY, 5 JAN**

Guinea Supreme Court upheld the election victory of Gen. Mamadi Doumbouya, cementing the junta leader as the democratically elected president four years after staging a coup.

Doumbouya won the country's first election since the 2021 coup after polling 86.7 per cent of the votes. His predicted victory was confirmed by the Supreme Court in the capital Conakry on Sunday.

"Today, there are neither winners nor losers. There is only one Guinea, united and indivisible," Doumbouya said in a broadcast, calling on citizens to "build a new Guinea of peace, justice, shared prosperity, and full political and economic sovereignty."

Yero Balde, the runner-up who won 6.59 per cent of the vote, had filed a petition accusing the electoral body of manipulating. But authorities said he withdrew the petition a day before the Supreme Court verdict. *— PTI*

## Waaree Energy Storage Solutions raises Rs 1,003 cr

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

Waaree Energies announced on Monday that its arm Waaree Energy Storage Solutions had raised Rs 1,003 crore from a cluster of strategic investors, including family offices, high-net-worth individuals, and institutional backers. Director Waaree Energy Storage Solutions Ankit Doshi, said, "This successful fund-raise underscores the confidence that our investor community places in our vision to build world-class energy storage manufacturing in India." The latest fundraise is part of the Rs 10,000-crore capital expenditure plan aimed at setting up a 20 GWh advanced, lithium-ion cell and battery pack manufacturing plant, the company said in a press release. The investment will pave the way for the Waaree Group's evolution into a fully integrated energy transition player, spanning solar modules, inverters, batteries, energy storage systems, and emerging clean energy technologies. —*PTI*

## SBI to promote India-Israel trade in rupee

JERUSALEM, 5 JAN

Amid deepening strategic ties and discussions around Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and Israel gaining momentum, the State Bank of India (SBI), the only Indian bank with a presence in Israel, is looking to facilitate bilateral trade in Indian rupees. "In view of India's significant trade flows from/to its partner countries and growing interest among the global trading community to trade in the Indian rupee, it has been envisaged by our banking regulators, i.e. Reserve Bank of India, to permit Indian banks to facilitate settlement of exports and imports of their respective corporate clientele in INR. Israel has been identified as one of the partner countries under this mechanism," CEO of SBI Israel, V Manivannan said. —*PTI*

## Swiggy's EatRight launched in over 50 cities

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

Swiggy on Monday announced the launch of EatRight, a new category targeting health-conscious users across more than 50 cities by offering them health-focused food options like high protein, low calorie and no added sugar under a single umbrella. The food delivery platform also shared insights based on its orders, revealing that Tier-2 cities in India witnessed 2x growth year-on-year in healthy food ordering as compared to metropolitan cities, with Chandigarh, Guwahati, Ludhiana, and Bhubaneswar leading the way. EatRight will offer over 1.8 million dishes available from over 2 lakh restaurants. In a statement, Swiggy said its partner brands are also creating new SKUs in line with the increased consumer focus on health-conscious eating. —*PTI*

## Senior industry leaders launch '100 Million Jobs'

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

A group of senior industry leaders on Monday announced the launch of the Hundred Million Jobs, a national initiative aimed at creating 100 million jobs in India over the next decade, as the country grapples with inadequate employment despite rapid economic growth. The initiative was announced by Harish Mehta, co-founder of software industry body Nasscom, AJ Patel, founder of global entrepreneur network The Indus Entrepreneurs, and K Yatish Rajawat, founder of the Centre for Innovation in Public Policy, a statement said. The mission places entrepreneurship, reskilling and job-intensive enterprise development at the centre of India's employment strategy. It aims to make job creation core metric of economic development, with a focus on distributed and resilient livelihoods. —*PTI*

# Markets decline amid US tariff hike threat

### Sensex drops by 322 pts, while Nifty declines by 78 pts

MUMBAI, 5 JAN

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Monday, dragged by blue-chip HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries and IT stocks amid fresh warning from the US to further raise tariffs against India.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 322.39 points or 0.38 per cent to settle at 85,439.62. During the day, it tanked 446.68 points or 0.52 per cent to 85,315.33.

After hitting a record intraday high of 26,373.20, the 50-share NSE Nifty failed to carry forward the momentum and declined 78.25 points or 0.30 per cent to end at 26,250.30.

From the 30-Sensex firms, HDFC Bank, Infosys, HCL Tech, Bajaj Finance, Tata Consultancy Services and Reliance Industries were among the biggest laggards.

In contrast, Bharat Electronics, Hindustan Unilever, Tata Steel and UltraTech Cement were among the gainers.

"The benchmark Nifty index scaled a new lifetime high of 26,373.20 during the session; however, profit-taking emerged near the top, dragging the index lower to test the crucial 26,200 support zone by the close. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 289.80 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. Domestic institutional investors (DIIs) also bought stocks worth Rs 677.38 crore.

"US President **Donald Trump**'s renewed remarks on potential tariff hikes against Indian imports linked to India's continued purchases of Russian oil added a layer of geopolitical caution to global markets, keeping risk appetite in check during today's session," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, dipped 0.13 per cent to USD 60.67 per barrel. —*PTI*

AMID VENEZUELA OIL CRISIS

# Reliance shares climb to hit fresh 52-week high

MUMBAI, 5 JAN

Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) and Oil & Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) shares saw a sharp climb on Monday amid the ongoing issues linked to Venezuela's oil sector, said sources. The shares of RIL climbed for the fourth straight session

According to sources, during the intraday trade, the shares of RIL rose up to 1.22 per cent and hit a fresh 52-week high, trading above Rs 1,600 before settling slightly lower on the National Stock Exchange (NSE). RIL's market capitalisation neared Rs 22 lakh crore amid the continued buying interest.

The advance in stocks boosted the investors' confidence and interest in the company, it said.

Meanwhile, ONGC's shares in early trade went up around 2 per cent, coming as one of the top gainers on the Nifty 50 index, the sources said.

According to Global Investment Bank, Jefferies, RIL, and ONGC could end up benefiting from the US takeover of Venezuelan oil, as Reliance will be able to purchase discounted Venezuelan crude after the lifting of the US sanctions.

This move may boost the RIL's gross refining margins, while ONGC will receive an unpaid dividend of USD 500 million, it added.

Regardless of this surge in the two firms, the prices of global crude stayed stable, highlighting the ongoing concerns over oversupply and broader demand dynamics, the sources said. —*Agencies*

# Rupee extends fall; ends at 90.30 against USD

MUMBAI, 5 JAN

The Indian rupee stayed weak for the fourth straight session and closed 10 paise lower at 90.30 against the US dollar on Monday, as a surge in geopolitical uncertainty has bolstered the greenback's appeal.

Forex traders said that renewed geopolitical uncertainties after the US military intervention in Venezuela fuelled dollar demand worldwide, while a sluggish domestic stock market, triggered by an exodus of foreign capital dented investor sentiments further.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 90.21 and touched the intra-day low of 90.50 during the session before ending at 90.30 against the greenback, 10 paise weaker compared to the previous closing level.

This was the fourth consecutive day of fall for the Indian currency, which has lost 55 paise since December 30, 2025, when it closed at 89.75 a dollar. The rupee settled 22 paise lower at 90.20 against the US dollar on Friday.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.27 per cent higher at 98.68. —*PTI*

## BCCL SETS PRICE BAND FOR IPO AT RS 21-23 PER SHARE

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

Bharat Coking Coal Ltd (BCCL), a subsidiary of Coal India, has announced a price band of Rs 21 to Rs 23 per share for its upcoming initial public offering (IPO), which is aimed at raising Rs 1,071 crore. At the upper end of this band, the company is valued at over Rs 10,700 crore. The IPO will officially open on 9 January, 2026, marking the first public issuance of the year, with an expected closing date of 13 January. Anchor investor bidding is scheduled for 8 January, as per the statement.

According to the red herring prospectus, the IPO is entirely an offer for sale of 46.57 crore equity shares by Coal India, valued at Rs 1,071.11 crore at the upper price mark. The listing of BCCL is part of a larger governmental divestment strategy in coal sector, aimed at unlocking value in Coal India's subsidiaries. —*PTI*

# Tata Group looking for new chiefs for Air India, AI Express

MUMBAI, 5 JAN

The Tata Group has begun scouting for a suitable candidate to head Air India, as the tenure of the in-cumbent, Campbell Wilson, will end next year, sources have said.

Meanwhile, the Group is also looking to appoint a new Manag-ing Director for its low-cost subsidiary Air India Express. Aloke Singh, will also be completing his tenure in the current position in 2027.

"Both sides (Wilson and Tata Group) don't want a renewal (of the contract after 2027). So, it is but natural to go to the mar-ket to look for suitable candidates for the top job at Air India," said a source privy to the information.

There were no comments from the Tata Group on this issue in response to a PTI query.

Sources, however, said that

it would take at least 3-6 months to finalise a suitable candidate for Air India, adding that if an overlap occurs, it would be good because the takeover would then become easier.

The final report on the Air India Boeing 787-8 crash at Ahmed-abad is expected around June.

Significantly, Wilson was at Tata House on Monday to attend a scheduled meeting, sources said.

Wilson was appointed as Air India's CEO and MD in July 2022, following former Turkish Airlines Chairman Ilker Ayci's decision not to take up the top job in March 2022 amid a controversy.

Tata Group acquired Air India from the government in January 2022. —*PTI*

# Gold prices rise Rs 960 to Rs 1.4 lakh/10g

MUMBAI, 5 JAN

Gold prices climbed Rs 960 to Rs 1,40,400 per 10g in the national capital on Monday, tracking strong global trends amid heightened geopolitical tensions, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 1,39,440 per 10g on Friday.

Silver prices also extended their sharp rally, climbing by Rs 2,600 to Rs 2,44,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) from Friday's close of Rs 2,41,400 per kg.

Traders said both gold and silver were driven by safe-haven demand as geopolitical risks have intensified.

In the international market, spot gold rose by USD 87.74, or 2.03 per cent, to USD 4,418.24 per ounce.

Spot silver also increased by USD 2.35, or 3.24 per cent, to USD 75.02 per ounce.\

"Silver prices are trading higher due to strong industrial and investment demand, ongoing supply concerns, and global geopolitical tensions," Satish Dondapati, VP & Fund Manager, Kotak Mutual Fund, said. —*PTI*

## 49 crypto exchanges registered with FIU during FY24-25

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

A total of 49 cryptocurrency exchanges, the majority of them based in India, were registered with the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) during the 2024-25 fiscal year as part of the country's legal regime to mitigate anti-money laundering and terrorist financing risks emerging from this sector, according to a report.

A "strategic analysis" of suspicious transaction reports (STRs) generated and furnished by these exchanges to the federal agency found "exploitation" of crypto funds for "serious" criminal activities like hawala (unaccounted) transactions, gambling, scam, fraud and an instance of operating an illegal adult content website.

In legal parlance, cryptocurrency is called Virtual Digital Asset (VDA) and the exchanges that trade them are called VDA Service Providers (VDA SPs). These exchanges were brought under India's anti-money laundering regime (Prevention of Money Laundering Act PMLA) linked reporting system in 2023.

## HDFC AMC launches ₹2,500 cr pvt credit fund

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

HDFC Asset Management Company has forayed into the fast-growing private credit market with its new Structured Credit Fund-I, targeting mid-market companies with alternative debt financing.

The International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, will invest up to Rs 220 crore as an anchor investor in HDFC AMC's Structured Credit Fund-I, the asset management company said in its statement on Monday. —*PTI*

# IT Minister hails shipping of $50B iPhones from India

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

Apple Inc. exported iPhones worth USD 50 billion from India in 2025, marking a significant milestone for the country's manufacturing sector. Union Minister for Railways, Information & Broadcasting, Electronics & Information Technology, **Ashwini Vaishnaw**, shared the development on X, attributing the growth to the 'Make in India' initiative and the transition toward a producer economy.

"In a major milestone for PM @narendramodi Ji's 'Make in India' and our quest to become a producer economy, Apple ships $50 billion worth of mobile phones in 2025," Vaishnaw said.

He emphasised that the current progress represents an initial stage in the country's industrial strategy. —*ANI*

## UREA IMPORTS SURGE TO 7.17MT IN APRIL-NOV: FAI

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

India's urea imports more than doubled to 7.17 million tonnes (MT) in the first eight months of the current fiscal year as domestic production declined, highlighting the country's growing dependence on foreign supplies to meet farmer demand, industry data showed on Monday.

Urea imports jumped 120.3 per cent to 7.17MT during April-November 2024-25 compared with 3.26MT in the year-ago period, according to data released by the Fertiliser Association of India. Domestic production fell 3.7 per cent to 19.75MT during the same period. Overall urea sales rose 2.3 per cent to 25.40MT, the data showed. In November alone, urea imports rose 68.4 per cent to 1.31MT. Sales rose 4.8 per cent to 3.75MT in November.

While we've achieved sales growth through coordinated planning, the significant reliance on imports underscores the importance of strategic supply chain management," FAI Chairman S Sankarasubramanian said. —*PTI*

TO LAUNCH EXCEL MUSIC LABEL

# *Universal to buy 30% in Excel Ent for ₹2,400 cr*

MUMBAI, 5 JAN

Universal Music India on Monday said it will pick up 30 per cent equity stake in film and digital content studio Excel Entertainment, valuing the Ritesh Sidhwani and Farhan Akhtar-founded firm at Rs 2,400 crore.

The deal, announced in presence of Akhtar's lyricist father Javed Akhtar and Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, provides the foundation for "a new strategic partnership" between Universal Music India and Excel Entertainment to accelerate the latter's growth and enhance the former's position in the Indian market, it said.

Excel Ent founders Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani with Zoya Akhtar, Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis, Javed Akhtar ***PHOTO: PTI***

Noting that Excel Entertainment has a strong track record in music, the statement said the Universal Music Group will gain global distribution rights for all future original soundtracks created for projects owned or controlled by Excel Entertainment as part of the deal. The alliance also includes the launch of a dedicated 'Excel music' label, which will be distributed globally by the Universal Music Group, it said, adding that the Universal Music Publishing Group will also become Excel's exclusive music publishing partner.

The deal announcement comes amid a spike in large stake buys in Bollywood production houses, including industrialist Adar Poonawalla picking up a 50 per cent stake in Karan Johar's Dharma Productions for Rs 1,000 crore and the more recent announcement of a 28 per cent stake buy by Saregama India in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's company for Rs 325 crore.

Universal Music India Chairman & Chief Executive Devraj Sanyal will join Excel's board, and Sidhwani and Akhtar will continue to shape creative direction and content decisions, the statement said. —*PTI*

# Network18 and CNN renew partnership till 2035

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

Omni-channel media company Network18 has renewed its partnership with CNN International for its flagship English news channel, CNN-News18, for the next 10 years.

With this, it has extended the brand and content licensing agreement for another decade till 31 December, 2035, according to a joint statement.

The partnership between Network18 and CNN International was first forged in 2005, then renewed in 2015, and now extended till 2035.

"The third decade of the relationship comes with even deeper bonds that encompass a strategic digital presence covering the world market. CNN-News18 will extend its digital footprint — including on YouTube and Connected TV (CTV) — to international markets, enabling the brand to reach global audiences across media platforms," it said.

CNN International, part of Warner Bros. Discovery, will continue to bring its global news leadership and editorial excellence to the collaboration, it added. —*PTI*

# Malaysia Open: Indian shuttlers eye strong start

KUALA LUMPUR, 5 JAN

With renewed vigour, Indian shuttlers, including the experienced duo of Lakshya Sen and P V Sindhu, will eye a strong start to the year when they take on the world's best at the season-opening USD 1,450,000 Malaysia Open Super 1000 tournament, beginning here on Tuesday.

Indian badminton endured a difficult 2025 marked by injuries and inconsistent performances at the top level. The focus is now on making an early impact and fine-tuning preparations for next week's India Open Super 750 tournament in Delhi.

Lakshya, a 2021 world championships bronze-medallist, was the bright spot last season, returning to winning ways with a title at the Australian Open Super 500 after a lean run following his fourth-place finish at the Paris Olympics.

The 24-year-old from Almora, who also reached the final of the Hong Kong Open, will look to carry that momentum when he opens against Singapore's Jia Heng Jason Teh.

Youngster Ayush Shetty too showed promise, winning the US Open Super 300, and will aim to address issues of consistency when he takes on Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia, the Paris Olympics bronze-medallist.

Two-time Olympic medallist Sindhu, however, endured a torrid phase due to fitness concerns and patchy form.

The former world champion, who missed competitions from October onwards while recovering from a foot injury, will be keen to rediscover her best when she opens her campaign against Chinese Taipei's Sung Shuo Yun.

Unnati Hooda, after showing flashes of brilliance in a season highlighted by her second Odisha Open title, will face Tokyo Olympics gold-medallist and fourth seed Chen Yu Fei of China. —*PTI*

# Root's 41st century leads England to 364 on Day 2

## Joe equals Ponting's tally of 100s, inches closer to Tendulkar

SYDNEY, 5 JAN

Joe Root's second century of the series *PHOTO: PTI*

Joe Root's second century of the series led England to 364 all out in its first innings just before tea on Day 2 of the fifth and final Ashes test.

Root's innings was finally ended at 160 from 242 balls on Monday when he popped a return catch to Michael Neser, who dived across the pitch to grasp the ball just inches above the ground.

Neser (4-60) was the pick of Australia's bowlers during the middle session with three wickets, including Will Jacks (27), Root, and the last wicket of Josh Tongue for a second-ball duck.

Earlier, Root's 41st test century, but just his second in an Ashes test Down Under, was the highlight of a morning session that saw Australia chip away at the middle order to have England on 336-6 at lunch. Scott Boland and Mitchell Starc made early breakthroughs after Root and Harry Brook's partnership had moved to 169 runs and was threatening to take the test away from the hosts, who already have a winning 3-1 lead in the series.

Boland (2-85) ended Brook's equal parts streaky and sublime innings at 84, with Steve Smith taking a sharp catch to bring to a close the best partnership of the series across both teams.

Then Starc (2-93) removed England skipper Ben Stokes (0) for the fifth time this series with a near unplayable delivery that shaped away from the left-hander, and the TV umpire review found it took a thin edge on its way through to Alex Carey.

Root made 138 not out in the second test at Brisbane, which was his first century in Australia in his four Ashes tours. The England star is now level with former Australia captain Ricky Ponting on the all-time list of test century-makers. Only Sachin Tendulkar (51) and Jacques Kallis (45) have more.

Jamie Smith made an enterprising, and at times fortunate, 46 before he holed out to the part-time medium pace of Marnus Labuschagne just before the break.

England lost each of the first three tests to allow Australia to retain the Ashes in just 11 days of on-field action.

England then won its first Ashes match Down Under since 2011 with a four-wicket win in the Boxing Day test.

Australia 166 for 2 (Head 91*, Stokes 2-30) trail England 384 (Root 160, Brook 84, Neser 4-60) by 218 runs —*PTI*

PARTICIPATION IN PGTI

# No decision yet on Bangladesh, says Kapil Dev

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

Cricket legend and current PGTI President Kapil Dev on Monday said no decision has been taken yet on whether Bangladeshi players will be allowed to feature in the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI).

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Sunday decided against sending its national team to India for the T20 World Cup next month, citing security concerns and government advice, following IPL franchise KKR's decision to release pacer Mustafizur Rahman on the BCCI's instruction.

"We'll sit down and talk about the recent issue. We haven't decided on it yet," Kapil said when asked about the possibility of excluding Bangladesh players from competing on the PGTI Tour.

Prominent golfers from Bangladesh competing on the PGTI tour include Jamal Hossain, Md Siddikur Rahman, and Md Akbar Hossain.

Kapil, however, declined to comment on the BCB's recent decision to approach the ICC.

The 1983 World Cup-winning captain was speaking on the sidelines of the launch of one of the franchises of '72 The League', a new franchise-based golf league envisioned by the PGTI, aimed at introducing a team format in a largely individual sport.

Kapil said India needs to explore team-based structures in golf to accelerate the sport's growth, drawing parallels with cricket's transformation after the introduction of the Indian Premier League.

"I played cricket, a team game. Golf, on the other hand, is an individual sport. But India needs a team format in golf as well," said the former all-rounder.—*PTI*

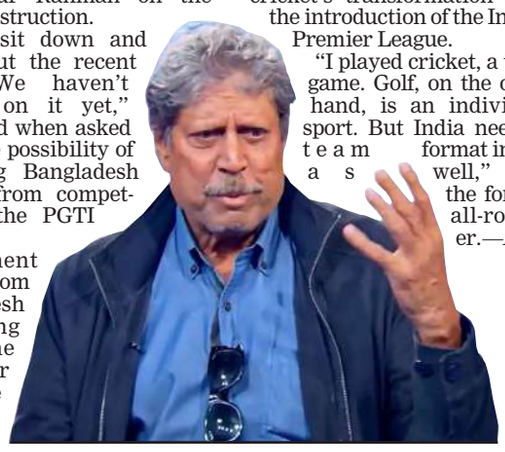


PHOTO: UC

## United Cup: Hubert stuns Zverev in comeback clash

SYDNEY, 5 JAN

Poland's Hubert Hurkacz returned from a near seven-month injury layoff to stun German y's Alexander Zverev 6-3, 6-4 in the United Cup on Monday, before Iga Swiatek beat Eva Lys 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 to secure the Group F tie in Poland's favour.Former Wimbledon semifinalist Hurkacz had surgery for a right knee injury in July, shortly after withdrawing from the Grand Slam's 2025 edition.The 28-year-old was nearly flawless in his comeback contest, landing 21 aces and committing no double faults as he beat three-time Grand Slam finalist Zverev in an hour and 23 minutes in Sydney."I was just trying to cherish and enjoy every moment here on the court today."Six-time Grand Slam winner Swiatek held her nerve and fought back from a set down to beat Lys in the women's singles clash and seal the tie 2-0. Poland will play the Netherlands in its last group match on Wednesday. —*PTI*

## Gauff clarifies comments on American tennis fans

PERTH, 5 JAN

Coco Gauff dropped a post on social media just before she started her United Cup singles match Monday, hoping to add context to her recent comments about American tennis fans.The issue was clearly a distraction, and the match didn't go well for the No. 4-ranked Guaff, who lost the first five games and struggled in a 6-1, 6-7 (3), 6-0 loss to No. 42 Jessica Bouzas Maneiro in Perth.It gave Spain a 1-0 lead over the defending champion U.S. team in the Group A contest. "I'm going to clarify because people are dragging this out of context," Gauff said in a pre-match morning social media post.—*PTI*



PHOTO: PTI

## Anahat gets into British Junior U-19 Open squash semis

BIRMINGHAM, 5 JAN

Rising Indian player Anahat Singh moved into the women's semifinals of the British Junior Under-19 Open squash tournament here. The teenage Indian top seed beat Egypt's Barb Sameh 11-4, 10-12, 11-9, 11-3 in the quarterfinals at the University of Birmingham. She will meet another Egyptian, Malika El Karasky (3/4), in the semifinals. Earlier, the Delhi player defeated Malak ElMaraghy of Egypt 11-3, 11-3, 11-6 in the last-16 round and Hong Kong's Wing Kai Gladys Ho 11-1, 11-3, 11-3 in the second round after receiving a first-round bye. Anahat had a breakout 2025, achieving a career-best world ranking of 28.—*PTI*

## PSG beats PFC 2-1 in Paris derby, Marseille loses at home

PARIS, 5 JAN

Defending champion Paris Saint-Germain stayed one point behind surprise Ligue 1 leader Lens after beating Paris FC 2-1 in the first capital city derby in French men's league soccer since 1990. Star forwards Désiré Doué and Ousmane Dembéle struck for PSG. Inconsistent Marseille is now eight points behind Lens in third place after losing 2-0 at home to Nantes earlier Sunday. The Paris derby was held at PSG's Parc des Princes stadium, which is just 44 meters away from where PFC plays its home games at Stade Jean Bouin since moving there this season.—*PTI*

## Virat Kohli unavailable for Railways, Pant to play

BENGALURU, 5 JAN

India superstar Virat Kohli will not feature in Delhi's fixture against Railways in the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Tuesday, head coach Sarandeep Singh told PTI.

Kohli, who made 131 and 77 on his return to the premier domestic one-day competition, will soon rejoin the national team for the ODI series against New Zealand beginning on January 11.

However, pacer Harshit Rana and wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant are available for selection for the game in Alur on Tuesday, said Sarandeep.

"Virat is not available. Pant and Harshit will be playing tomorrow," said the head coach and former India spinner.

DDCA president Rohan Jaitely had earlier indicated that Kohli would play three games. Delhi currently leads Group D with four wins in five matches, and a victory against Railways should be enough to advance in the tournament. —*PTI*

## Mir secures landmark top-5 finish on junior class debut

ABU DHABI, 5 JAN

The 11-year-old racing prodigy Atiqa Mir made a spectacular switch from mini to the much tougher junior S125 category as she became the first Indian to secure a top-five finish globally on debut during round seven of the IAME UAE Karting Championship at the fabled Yas Marina Circuit.

Atiqa, the first Indian to be supported by Formula 1 Academy, could have spent another season dominating championships in the mini category (age 8-12), but she has been thrown in atthe deep end with the move up to the junior S125 category (age 12-14) in the new year. —*PTI*

WTT YOUTH CONTENDER

# Aadya, Biswas clinch U-11 girls and U-11 boys singles titles

VADODARA, 5 JAN

Aadya Baheti and Rajdeep Biswas registered comfortable wins to be crowned the U-11 girls singles and U-11 boys singles champions respectively in the WTT Youth Contender here on Monday.

In the U-11 girls singles final, Aadya defeated Sakshya Santosh 15-13, 11-8, 12-10, while Biswas got the better of Sharvil Karambelkar 11-8, 11-6, 11-13, 11-4 in the boys singles summit clash.

In the boy's U-15 event, Vivaan Dave defeated Rishaan Chattopadhyay 9-11, 11-9, 11-6, 11-3 to advance to the quarterfinals. He will next face Rudra Jena, who got the better of U-13 boys singles champion Dev Pranav Bhatt 11-4, 11-8, 11-5.

U-15 girls singles top seed Ankolika Chakraborty, second seed Naisha Rewaskar, and the up-and-coming Tanishka Kalbhairav also booked their last eight spots with comfortable wins over their respective opponents.

The top seeds in the U-19 girls and boys singles also advanced to the quarterfinals without breaking much sweat.

The second edition of the WTT Youth Contender featured a total of 226 players competing across U-11 to U-19 age categories. —*PTI*

## DJOKOVIC CUTS TIES WITH TENNIS GROUP HE CO-FOUNDED

WASHINGTON, 5 JAN

Novak Djokovic is cutting ties with the Professional Tennis Players Association, a group he co-founded that sued the sport's governing bodies last year, writing on social media that "my values and approach are no longer aligned with the current direction of the organization."

The 24-time Grand Slam champion announced at the 2020 U.S. Open that he and now-retired Canadian player Vasek Pospisil were launching the PTPA. They said they were aiming to offer representation for players who are independent contractors in a largely individual sport.

One of the goals made clear along the way was to become a sort of full-fledged union that negotiates collective bargaining agreements like those that exist in team sports, although that sort of thing hasn't happened. —*PTI*

## SMRITI, JEMIMAH FEATURE IN NADA'S 2026 Q1 RTP LIST

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

Star Indian women cricketers Smriti Mandhana and Jemimah Rodrigues were among the prominent additions to the National Anti-Doping Agency's Registered Testing Pool for the first quarter of 2026, but athletics accounted for the lion's share of 118 names in the 347-strong list.

In all, 120 names were added to the previous RTP that comprised 227 athletes.

Athletes listed in RTP are required to share their whereabouts with the anti-doping agency and be available for testing in a specified window every day. Three failures to provide whereabouts are considered a doping violation.

Athletics, which accounted for 68 names in the previous NADA RTP, has a markedly higher presence in the new one, with big names such as steeplechaser Avinash Sable, hurdler Jyothi Yarraji, decathlete Tejaswin Shankar, and sprinter Animesh Kujur included for the first quarter.

Sable is returning to the NADA list after being excluded from the World Anti-Doping Agency's RTP, which only features the javelin throw duo of Neeraj Chopra and Sachin Yadav now. —*PTI*

## Neeraj Chopra parts ways with JSW Sports

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

Two-time Olympic medal-winning javelin throw star Neeraj Chopra has ended his decade-long partnership with JSW Sports to launch his own athlete management firm, Vel Sports.

Chopra has been associated with JSW Sports since 2016. "Over the last decade, our journey together has been one of growth, belief, and achievement. JSW Sports has played a defining role in my career, and I'll always remain grateful for their support and vision," the 27-year-old Chopra said in a press release. "As we conclude this chapter, I carry forward the same values into the next phase of my journey," he added. The statement said that both parties were parting ways with "deep respect and pride. —*PTI*

INDIA LOSES NAT'L COACH

# *Ex-billiards champ Manoj Kothari dies at 67*

KOLKATA, 5 JAN

Former world billiards champion Manoj Kothari *PHOTO: PTI*

Former world billiards champion Manoj Kothari, one of the most influential figures in Indian cue sports, died on Monday following a massive cardiac arrest at a hospital in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, a family member told PTI. He was 67.

He is survived by his wife, son Sourav Kothari -- also a former world billiards champion and daughter Shreya Kothari.

Kothari, who is the current chief national coach, was being treated at a Tirunelveli hospital for more than a week and suffered cardiac arrest around 7.30 am, the family member said.

His cremation took place on Monday evening near Tirunelveli. Long before Sourav etched his name among India's modern greats in cue sports, the foundations of that legacy were laid by Kothari, himself a former world champion and a towering personality in Indian billiards for more than three decades. Kothari rose to global prominence after winning the IBSF World Billiards Championship in 1990, a title that placed him firmly among the elite of the sport and marked India's growing stature on the world billiards map. He added another major international title in 1997, when he won the World Doubles Billiards Championship, underlining his versatility and longevity at the highest level.

Post his playing career, Kothari played a defining role in shaping Indian cue sports as a coach and mentor. —*PTI*

## U'KHAND CRICKETER RAJAN KUMAR FAILS DOPE TEST

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

Uttarakhand left-arm pacer Rajan Kumar failed a dope test and was handed provisional suspension by the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) in a rare case involving a cricketer.

The 29-year-old Kumar's dope sample was found to contain anabolic steroids Drostanolone and Metenolone, as well as Clomifene, which is generally used as a medication to treat infertility in women but also can restore testosterone levels among men. —*PTI*